

'TOM MERRY'S TRIAL!'



The GEM

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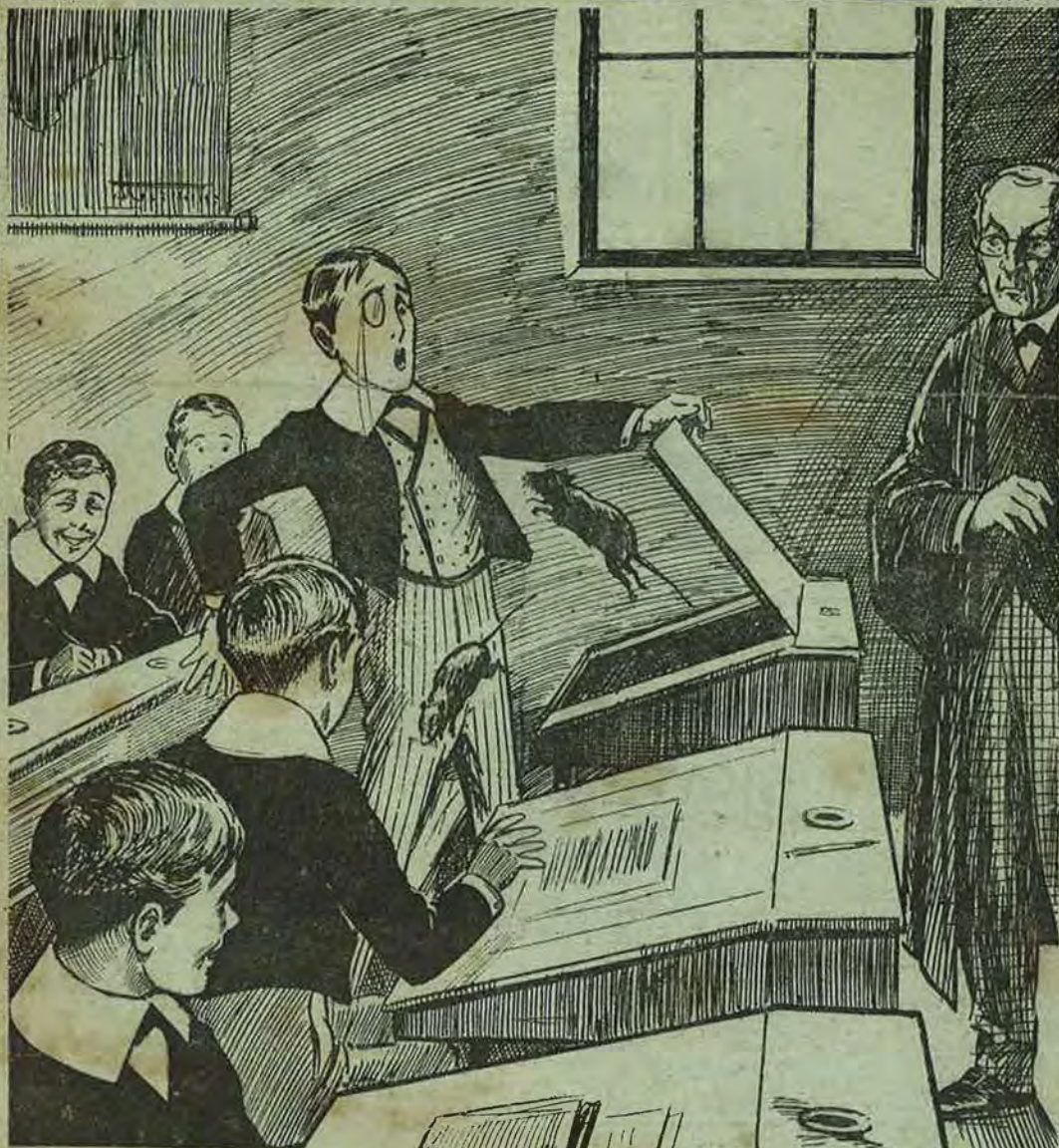
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VOL. 4.

Grand Long
Complete
Tale.

A Tale of the Terrible Three.

by
MARTIN
CLIFFORD.



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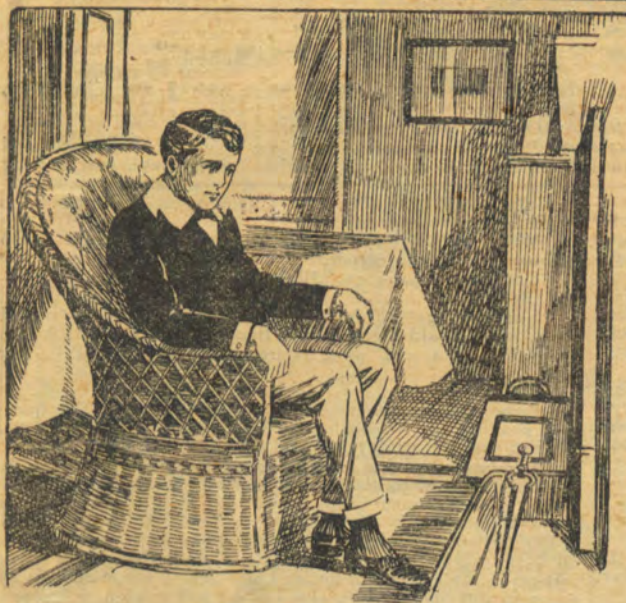
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TOM MERRY & CO.'S TRIAL.

A Grand Long, Complete Tale
of the Juniors of
St. Jim's.

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

CHAPTER 1. A Joke on Gussy.

"WHAT have you got there?"

"Rats!"

Tom Merry reddened.

He had asked Jack Blake a perfectly civil question as he met him near the door of the Fourth Form class-room at St. Jim's, and he naturally expected a civil answer. Blake was coming quietly along the passage, with one hand concealed under his jacket, evidently holding something.

"Blake!"

"Well?" said Blake, with a grin.

"I asked you a civil question," said Tom Merry.

"Well, and I've answered it."

"If you are looking for a thick ear," began Tom Merry, pushing back his cuffs in a business-like way, "I'm ready to oblige you. It's a bit beneath the dignity of a Shell fellow to have a dust-up with a Fourth-Former, but if you're in need of a lesson—"

"Oh, keep your wool on," said Blake, with perfect good-humour, "I'm not looking for trouble! I answered your question because you asked it."

"You said 'rats,'" said Tom Merry wrathfully.

"Exactly!"

"Oh, you're off your rocker! What have you got under your jacket?"

"Rats!"

"Look here!" roared Tom Merry. "If you persist in being funny you will get a dot on the nose! What have you got there?"

"Rats!"

Tom Merry's eyes sparkled. He reached out with his right and gave Jack Blake a tap on the nose that sent him staggering against the wall. Blake gave a yell.

"You ass! They'll get loose!"

A bag dropped from under his jacket, with a flop on the floor, and there came a shrill squeaking from it that made

Tom Merry start in amazement. There was no mistaking the squeaking of angry and excited rodents.

"Rats!" exclaimed Tom Merry, in surprise.

"Didn't I tell you so?"

"You—you said—"

"Rats!"

Blake stooped and picked up the cloth bag. There was a hole in one corner where the rats were nibbling a way of escape. Blake held the bag cautiously by the string, to keep his fingers secure from the busy jaws within.

Tom Merry stared at the bag, and then at Blake.

"What on earth have you got them for?" he asked.

"What's the idea of carrying round rats in a bag?"

"I'm taking them into the class-room."

"What for?"

"Gussy."

"What on earth does D'Arcy want rats in the class-room for?"

"He doesn't want them," said Blake, with a grin; "but he's going to have them, all the same. You see, I'm going to shove them in his desk, and give him a jump. He left them on my hands, and that's the best thing I can think of doing with them."

Tom Merry laughed as he followed Blake into the class-room.

"Surely Gussy didn't catch them?" he asked.

"No!" said Blake indignantly. "Binks caught them. Gussy saw Binks taking them out to drown 'em. He saved them from humanitarian motives, and gave Binks a tanner. Then he left them in the study, and they've been squeaking there for ever so long. I don't know whether he was going to find them a home, or keep them as study pets. Anyway, I'm going to find them a home in his desk."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've had enough of their squeaking in the study. I—Hullo, Skimpole!"

Blake was entering the Fourth-Form class-room as he spoke, and he ran right into Skimpole of the Shell, who was

A DOUBLE-LENGTH TALE OF TOM MERRY NEXT THURSDAY.

No. 104 (New Series).

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coming out. Skimpole started back, and caught his big spectacles, which were sliding down his nose with the shock. A bundle of manuscript he was carrying under his arm slipped and nearly fell, but he saved it with a desperate clutch just in time.

"Really, Blake!" he gasped.

"You ass!" grunted Blake. "What are you doing in our class-room, anyway? Scat!"

"I came—"

"Oh, buzz off!"

"Yes; but I—"

"Scat!" growled Blake. "Kick him out, Tom Merry, will you?"

"Certainly!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "Anything to oblige."

"Really, Merry—"

"Outside, Skimmy!"

Skimpole had been making for the door, but now he stopped still, and stood his ground. He put the packet of foolscap—a couple of quires or more of it—under his left arm, and doubled up his right fist—a big, bony fist, with very large knuckles. Tom Merry and Blake watched the process in amazement.

"What's the little game?" asked Tom Merry at last.

Skimpole blinked at them.

"I decline to go out of the class-room," he said. "As a sincere Socialist, I claim the right to enter, stand, sit, or remain where I choose, when I choose, and how I choose. I decline to leave the class-room."

Tom Merry chuckled, and Blake snorted.

The rats were gnawing their way out of the bag, and at any moment they might betray themselves by a squeak, and Blake, of course, did not wish his little "jape" on D'Arcy to be given away before it had been carried out. But when Skimpole mounted his hobby-horse, he was not to be dismounted easily. Skimpole was an amateur Socialist, and he "had it bad," and on all occasions, in season and out of season, he was ready to hold forth upon his favourite subject.

"Kick him out, Tom Merry!"

"I shall not allow Merry to kick me out," said Skimpole, with dignity. "Although, as a Socialist, I deprecate every form of violence, yet, if Merry attempts to eject me from this class-room, I shall strike him with violence upon the nose."

"Oh, dear!" moaned Tom Merry. "Fancy being stricken with violence upon the nose! Skimmy, as you are strong, be merciful."

"Will you kick the idiot out?"

"Really, Blake, I regard the term idiot as being almost rude. It is hopelessly illogical, too, as you are mentally much more in approximation to idiocy. You see—"

"Outside!" grinned Tom Merry.

"Certainly not. I—"

"March!"

"I decline!"

Tom Merry advanced upon the Socialist of St. Jim's, and Skimpole, true to his threat, struck out with violence. But his bony fist only swept the air, as Tom Merry dodged round him, and took a grip on the back of his collar.

"Ow!" gasped Skimpole.

"March!"

"But I object—"

Biff! Tom Merry's knee bumped on Skimpole, and propelled him towards the door. The amateur Socialist wriggled, and half a dozen sheets of foolscap escaped from the pack under his arm, and floated away upon the floor.

"Ow!" gasped Skimpole. "I object to violence."

"Will you march, then?"

"You see—"

"Go ahead!"

And Tom Merry, with an iron hand, marched the amateur Socialist out of the class-room, and along the passage, as far as the stairs. Skimpole shed sheets of foolscap along the passage as he went, and had less than half his packet left by the time they arrived at the stairs. There Tom Merry ran him up against the banisters.

"Now, are you going to keep the peace, Skimmy?"

"Certainly, Merry. It is necessary for me to collect up the paper I have dropped, as I am about to write out my contribution for the 'Weekly.'"

Tom Merry grinned, and released the genius of the Shell.

"Now, remember, there's a time for argument, and a time not for argument, Skimmy," he said sententiously. "Whenever you begin to argue, it's not a time for argument; so whenever you start, it's time to shut up. Savvy?"

"Really, Merry—"

"If you would only bear that in mind, it would save you a lot of jaw, and your hearers a lot of listening," said Tom Merry severely.

"Really—"

"Why, now you're beginning again. Scat!"

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NEXT THURSDAY: "THE TERRIBLE THREE'S TOUR." BY MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Blake came along the passage grinning. Skimpole, after blinking dubiously at Tom Merry for a few seconds, as if trying to make up his mind whether the hero of the Shell was serious or not, went along collecting up his lost papers.

"All right, Blake?" asked Tom Merry.

Blake nodded, with a grin.

"Right as rain! Gussy will have a surprise at lessons this afternoon!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

CHAPTER 2.

Blake Stands Treat.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY came into Study No. 6, in the Fourth Form passage, and glanced round through his eyeglass. Jack Blake was sitting in the window, looking out into the quad, and exchanging chaff with a group of New House juniors below.

"Blake, deah boy—"

Jack Blake looked round.

"Hallo, is that you, Gus?"

"Yaas, wathah! Where are the wats?"

"What wats?"

"The wats! You know what wats I am alludin' to, Blake."

"Oh, the rats!" said Blake.

"Yaas. Pway don't be an ass, you know. I purchased them fwm Binks for humanitawian motives, and I want to look aftah them. I've brought them some gwub."

And Arthur Augustus laid a packet on the table. His chum looked at it curiously.

"What is it, Gussy?" He sniffed. "It seems to be talking through the paper."

"Pway don't be coarse, Blake. It's cheese."

"Oh!"

"I asked Taggles if he had anythin' that would do to feed wats, and he said I could have that cheese. He said it had been forgotten and wasn't any good, but would do for wats."

"Rats!"

"I suppose it's good enough," said D'Arcy. "The question is, deah boy, whothah I shall be able to tame those wats. Mellish says you can't tame wild wats."

"I've never heard of it being done," grinned Blake. "You won't tame those particular specimens of the wild wat, in any case."

"I don't see why I shouldn't twy," said D'Arcy thoughtfully. "It seemed vewy wuff on them to be drowned like wats in a twap, you know. That's why I took them away from Binks. I can't let them go, as I told him I wouldn't release them in the house. Hewwies was bwutal enough to suggest that I should give them to his bulldog."

"Well, Towser would like them."

"The wats wouldn't like it, Blake. I don't see why they should be tweated with cwuety because they happen to be wodents."

"Well, no, only a beast would hurt a rat, or anything else," said Blake; "but they ought to be killed. One can't have rats in a house."

"Yaas, but ddownin' is a howwid death. I was neahly ddowned once, when Tom Mewy pulled me out of the wivah—a vewy bwave and genewous action on his part, for he uttally wuined his clothes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If I cannot tame the wats I shall take them to a lothah chambah, and have them painlessly extwacted—I mean painlessly killed," said D'Arcy. "My aunt wuined a vewy stwong on cwuety to animals. She w'ote to me only yesterday, and mentioned that she was goin' to a meetin' of the Association for the Suppression of Fishin'."

"More rats!"

"Well, she enclosed me a fivah, you know, so I am bound to weward what she says with pwopah wewpect," said Arthur Augustus. "Fivahs are gettin' ware now. The governah says he can't keep 'em up since the Budget. That amounts to me payin' the supah-tax out of my pocket-money. I weward it as wuff. I was thinkin' of w'itin' to Lloyd George on the subject, puttin' it to him as a sportsman."

"Good wheeze! There's still time, you know, before your relations in the Upper House pass the Budget," grinned Blake.

"But about the wats. I want to feed them," said D'Arcy. "Dig. waives an objection to my keepin' them in the study. He says the cage niffs, and he won't stand it. Dig. is vewy dense on the subject of humanitawianism. I can't keep them in the outhouse with the pets, because some beast would be sure to feed them to Towshah or Pongo."

"Very likely; but you can't keep them here."

"I'm afwaid there is no othah wewsource. Where are they, Blake? I twust you have not hidden them for a wotten joke?"



"March!" Tom Merry, with an iron hand, marched the amateur Socialist out of the class-room and along the passage, shedding sheets of foolscap at every step.

"The fact is, old chap, I've found them a home," said Blake blandly.

Arthur Augustus started.

"You've found them a home, deah boy?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Where?"

"That's a secret for the present. You'll know this afternoon."

"Well, if it's a comfy home I don't know that I object," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "Of course, you had no right to do anythin' of the sort without consultin' me, and I wegard you as an ass!"

"Thank you!"

"I am not sure whethah I ought not to give you a feashful thwashin' for your cheek."

Blake pushed back his cuffs.

"Come on, Gussy!"

"On second thoughts I will let you off," said D'Arcy, with a wave of the hand. "I wegard you as an iwresponsible ass. I have taken the twouble to get this cheese for nothin'."

"Well, if you got it for nothing it must have been cheap, at all events."

"Pway don't wot, deah boy! I am goin' to change a fivah at the tuckshop. You can come with me if you like."

"Right-ho!" said Blake heartily. "Never shall it be said

that I refused to help a chum to change a fiver in the hour of need. But you'd better kill that cheese first."

"Weally, Blake—"

"It's simply talking, you know. It would have been rough on rats."

"I will leave it here," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully.

"It certainly does smell wathah stwong. I had to cawwy it at arm's length, you know. If I leave it on the table one of the fellows is bound to take it away—Hewwies or Dig, can do it."

And he left the packet of ancient cheese on the table.

In the passage he ran his hands through his pockets in search of the five-pound note, and stopped with an expression of perplexity on his face.

"Come on!" exclaimed Blake impatiently. "It's only a few minutes to school."

"Yaas, but—"

"We sha'n't have five minutes in the tuckshop as it is."

"Yaas, wathah, but—"

"You haven't lost the fiver, surely?"

"I hope not, but—"

"Never mind, I've got some tin. I'm flush to-day," said Blake, feeling in his pockets and producing a sovereign.

"Look here!"

"Good, deah boy! But that fivah—"

"Never mind the five. We'll change this sovereign instead."

"Vewy well, but I wish I could wemembah where I left the fivah," said Arthur Augustus. "Fivahs are rettin' so scarce since the Budget that I can't afford to lose one."

"Never mind; come on."

"Oh, vewy well!"

And they went downstairs. They met Herries and Dig. on the way, and when Herries and Dig. learned where they were going they promptly joined them. The Terrible Three—Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, of the Shell—were sunning themselves on the School House steps.

"Hallo! Whither bound?" asked Tom Merry cheerily.

"Tuckshop," said Dig. "Blake's going to change a sovereign. Blessed if I know where he gets these sovereigns! I never have any."

"I found this one," said Blake.

"Eh? You don't mean to say—"

"Ass! I found it in an old jacket of mine," said Blake crossly. "You don't think I'd stick to anybody else's money I found, do you?"

"Of course not, ass!"

"It was a tip from my uncle the last time he came to St. Jim's," explained Blake. "I shoved it into my pocket, and it slipped into the lining, I think, because when I looked for it I couldn't find it, and I thought I must have put it somewhere else. I was cutting up the old jacket this morning to make a pen-wiper, and this blessed sovereign rolled out of the lining."

"By Jove! What a stroke of luck!"

"Yes, wasn't it? If I hadn't been so busy looking after Gussy's rats I should have stood a feed."

"Weally, Blake—"

"It's never too late to mend," said Tom Merry, slipping off the stone balustrade. "It's nice of you to invite us like this. Come on, kids!"

"Certainly!" said Lowther.

"With pleasure!" said Manners.

"Bai Jove! Weally, you know—"

"Oh, the more the merrier!" grinned Blake. "Come on! I say, Figgy, come and have some ginger-pop?"

"What-ho!" said Figgins of the New House heartily.

And several more fellows joined Blake as the procession made its way to the school shop, kept within the precincts of St. Jim's by Dame Taggles, the wife of the school porter.

Quite a little crowd poured into the shop, and Mrs. Taggles came out of her parlour with a bland smile upon her face.

"Ginger-pop and tarts," said Blake. "Buck up, there isn't much time."

"Certainly, Master Blake."

"Wire in, you fellows. It's nearly time for school."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Oh, that's all right!" grinned Tom Merry. "It's wonderful the speed you can put on when the tarts are nice and you get them for nothing."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake jangled the sovereign on the counter. As a rule, he was as careful as the average junior with his money, but this sovereign had come so unexpectedly that he felt he was justified in "bluing" it. And, after all, all the fellows he was with had stood him feeds at various times, so the "bluing" of the sovereign was only paying off debts.

A fat, ruddy face looked in at the door.

"You fellows feeding?" asked Fatty Wynn.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Did you call me, Blake?" asked Wynn, coming into the tuckshop.

Jack Blake chuckled.

"No, I didn't, but you can come in all the same. Go for the tarts, Fatty—dig into them. The bell goes in a few minutes."

Fatty Wynn needed no second invitation.

He had put a very good dinner out of sight, but he was always ready for a feed, and the speed with which he demolished the tarts, cakes, and buns was amazing. Herries gave him a slap on the back.

"Go it, Fatty!"

"I'm g-g-going it!" gasped Fatty, with his mouth full. "This—this is very d-decent of you, Blake. Have you come into a fortune?"

"I've found a sovereign."

"In whose pocket?" asked Mellish of the Fourth, coming into the shop.

Jack Blake looked at him.

"Is that meant for a joke, Mellish?" he asked.

"Ye-es," said Mellish, not quite liking the look in Blake's eye. "It was a j-joke, you know. Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you making that horrid row for?"

"I—I was laughing."

"Well, don't, if it sounds like filing a saw. And don't make any more jokes. I don't like them—of that sort."

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NEXT THURSDAY: "THE TERRIBLE THREE'S TOUR." By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"Oh, all right! Can I have some of the ginger-pop?"

"Here you are!"

Jack Blake opened a bottle, and the cork caught Mellish under the chin, and the froth of the liquor foamed over his face. Mellish gave a yell, and started back.

"Ow! Yow! Ow!"

"Oh, it's only a joke," grinned Blake. "You're not the only joker in the Fourth Form, you know. Ha, ha, ha!"

"You beast!"

"Have some more ginger-pop?"

"Yah, you beast!"

And Mellish, mopping his face with his handkerchief, strode out of the shop. But he was not missed. Mellish was often called the cad of the Fourth, and he was generally disliked. He frequently made little jokes, but they always had an unpleasant edge to them, and left his victims with an uncomfortable feeling. And Jack Blake was about the last fellow in the world to take an ill-natured jape quietly.

Quite a number of fellows heard of what was toward in the tuckshop, and strolled in to lend a hand with the ginger-pop. Skimpole of the Shell, and Gore, and Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn, and Kangaroo, and Reilly and Kerruish, and Kerr came in. The little shop was soon full up. Suddenly a bell began to ring.

"Oh, rats!" said Tom Merry. "There's the blessed bell!"

"Never mind, there can't be much of the sovereign left," grinned Digby. "How much change, Mrs. Taggles?"

"Master Blake owes me one and fourpence as well as the sovereign," said Mrs. Taggles.

"Go it, Blake!"

Jack grinned, and paid up. Then the juniors swarmed out of the tuckshop, and made their way towards their respective class-rooms.

CHAPTER 3.

Rats.

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS was feeling in his pockets again as he crossed the quad, with his friends. Skimpole of the Shell tapped him on the shoulder, and the swell of St. Jim's looked round.

"You remember that I asked you for the loan of some foolscap for writing out the contribution to Tom Merry's 'Weekly'?" began Skimpole.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, I have taken it."

"Eh?"

"If I remember correctly, you told me to go and eat coke," said Skimpole. "You then left me abruptly. Of course, it was absurd to tell me to attempt to masticate such an innutritious substance as coke, and I did not even think of doing so. However, I took the foolscap. Of course, under Socialism all foolscap will be nationalised, and it is really as much mine as yours. I thought I would mention it to you."

"Bai Jove!"

"It would have been more graceful on your part to give me the foolscap, but I did not mind the trouble of taking it from your desk."

"Bai Jove!"

"That is all, D'Arcy. I thought I would mention it."

"Gweat Scott! I don't mind you havin' the papah, Skimmay, but I wegrad you as a cheeky ass. I weally think I ought to give you a thwashin'."

"Really, D'Arcy—"

Blake grasped his elegant chum by the arm.

"Buck up, Gussy! The bell's stopped."

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"Yaas, but I wegard it as a duty to give Skimmay a feahful thwashin'. You see—"

"Oh, never mind Skimmy! Come on."

"Yaas, but—"

"Take his other fin, Dig."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Skimmay, I shall welect ovah this mattah, and if I decide to give you a feahful thwashin', I—"

But D'Arcy was rushed off before he could get further. Skimpole blinked at him through his big spectacles, and went off to the Shell class-room. Blake and Dig rushed D'Arcy after the rest of the Fourth towards the Form-room.

"Pway welease me, deah boys," said D'Arcy; "I will come now. You are wafflin' the sleeves of my jacket, and throwin' me into quite a fluttah."

"Well, come on, then, ass!"

"I wefuse to be called an ass."

Blake snorted, and went into the class-room. The Fourth were taking their places, and Mr. Lathom was already at his desk. Arthur Augustus sat down on the form beside Blake. There was a faint, peculiar sound proceeding from his desk, but D'Arcy did not notice it for the moment.

"Bai Jove!" he murmured. "I wemembah now."

Blake looked at him.

"About the fivah," said D'Arcy; "I put it in my desk."

"Phew!"

"I weally do not see anythin' to be astonished at, Blake. Why should I not put a fivah in my desk?"

"My hat! If the rats have got out of the bag!" murmured Blake. "They'll gnaw everything they see, and—"

"What did you say, Blake?"

"Nothin'."

Arthur Augustus turned to his desk again. He took hold of the lid and raised it, little dreaming what was to follow. Squeak, squeak, scuttle!

Two big rats leaped out of the desk, and Arthur Augustus gave a yell.

"Yaroo!"

There was an exclamation from the whole class as D'Arcy leaped to his feet. One of the rats ran down his leg and disappeared, and the other, frightened out of its wits, jumped into the inside of D'Arcy's jacket. D'Arcy always wore the lowest button of his jacket fastened, when he wore a jacket, as at the present moment. The rat found himself in cosy quarters, and remained there.

"Ow!" gasped D'Arcy. "It's a—a wat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Really—" said Mr. Lathom. "Boys!"

"It's a wat! Yaroo!"

Arthur Augustus scrambled out of the class. The rat dropped to the floor and scuttled off, but D'Arcy did not see him go, and under the impression that the rodent was still clinging to him, he tore off his jacket madly.

As he swung the jacket round, the end of it caught Mr. Lathom across the face as he came towards the scene.

"Oh!" gasped the Form-master.

He staggered back and caught hold of his desk for support. Arthur Augustus, too excited to notice what he had done, shook the jacket frantically in the air.

He waited for the rat to drop out, but as the rat was already gone, that naturally did not happen.

"Blake! Dig! Did you see the wat dwop?"

"No," roared Dig.

"Bai Jove, he must have got into my waistcoat, then! Oh, howwor!"

And Arthur Augustus tore off his waistcoat, revealing the whitest of shirts and the fanciullest of braces. He shook the waistcoat in the air, but no rat dropped out.

"Bai Jove! Did you see him, deah boys?"

"No, no!"

"Go it!"

"D'Arcy!" gasped Mr. Lathom, thinking that the elegant Fourth-former had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

"D'Arcy! How dare you?"

"It's in your bags, Gussy!" spluttered Digby. "It must be, go on."

"Lock the door!" gasped Reilly. "Lock the door, in case Mrs. Mimms or Sarah should come in."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"D'Arcy I forbid you to proceed."

"But, sir—"

"What do you mean by this—this extraordinary scene?"

"It's a wat, sir."

"What?"

"There were wats in my desk, sir, and one of them jumped into my clothes, sir. I think it must have got away," said Arthur Augustus, putting up his eyeglass and staring round him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Blake. "It got away the moment you jumped up."

"Weally, Blake, you might have told me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"D'Arcy, this is—this is absolutely indecent!" gasped Mr. Lathom. "Put on your things immediately."

"Weally, sir—"

"Immediately!" thundered Mr. Lathom.

"Oh, vewy well, sir!"

And the swell of St. Jim's donned his waistcoat and jacket. Mr. Lathom looked at him severely through his spectacles.

"I presume that you have been the victim of an absurd joke, D'Arcy," he said, "otherwise I should punish you."

"Yaas, sir. Some ass must have put the wats in my desk, sir."

"Take your place at once."

"With pleasure, sir."

And Arthur Augustus sat down. Blake was nearly suffocating.

"You wottah!" whispered D'Arcy. "I shall wegard it as a duty to give you a feahful thwashin' aftah school."

"Ha, ha, ha!" gurgled Blake.

"It was you put the wats in my beastly desk."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was thwown into quite a fluttah."

"Oh, hold me, somebody!"

D'Arcy looked into his desk with a frowning brow. His search there occupied him several minutes. There was a dust of gnawed wood in the desk, and fragments of paper that the keen teeth of the rodents had torn into shreds. It was mostly blank foolscap, of which the swell of the Fourth had a considerable supply in his desk.

Arthur Augustus turned a serious face towards his chum.

"I suppose you wegard this as a good joke, Blake?"

"What-ho!" chuckled Blake. "I told you I had found the rats a comfortable home, you know."

"It is a wathah expensive joke."

"How so?"

"The wats have eaten my fivah."

"My only hat!"

Mr. Lathom looked round.

"I am sure there is someone talking," he said. "Silence in class!"

And no more was said of the rats or the fiver just then.

CHAPTER 4.

The Missing Fiver.

JACK BLAKE wore a worried look. He gave Mr. Lathom several absent-minded answers, and earned for himself a steadily increasing quantity of reproof. But he did not think about the lines. D'Arcy's fiver weighed on his mind. Fivers were fivers, and if the rats had eaten the fiver, it was a serious matter. Five pounds did not grow on every bush, and it would be a heavy loss to Arthur Augustus, and to all Study No. 6. If the fiver was really destroyed, the jape with the rats had turned out to be an expensive one indeed.

Blake was glad enough when lessons were over, and the Fourth Form was dismissed. After Mr. Lathom had left the Form-room he intended to make an examination. It was quite possible that D'Arcy was mistaken, and that the banknote was safe in some corner of the desk.

He made the remark to Arthur Augustus as the Form went out, but the swell of the Fourth shook his head.

"Imposs., deah boy."

"But you didn't have time to search through the desk, ass."

"I wefuse to be called an ass."

"I say you didn't have time—"

"There was nothin' in my desk but some foolscap, some books, and the banknote," said D'Arcy. "I pwesume that even you would not have been duffah enough to put the wats in there if there had been anythin' of importance."

"Well, I looked in, and saw only some books and papers," said Blake. "Of course, if the rats had a taste for Virgil or Tordhunter, there was no reason why they shouldn't have a bite."

"Weally, Blake—"

"But I never saw anything of the banknote."

"It was shoved undah the foolscap."

"I dare say it's there still."

"I've looked."

"Yes, but you're such a blessed juggins, you know. I'll have another look when Lathom's buzzed off."

"I decline to be chawactewised as a juggins. Pway don't poke me in the wibs in that wude and vulgah way, Mellish! I do not like it."

"I want to speak to you, D'Arcy," said Mellish, of the Fourth.

"Want some more ginger-pop?" demanded Blake.

Mellish scowled.

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"I wasn't speaking to you, Blake. I'm speaking to D'Arcy. I say, D'Arcy, can you lend me a few bobs till to-morrow?"

"Sowwy, deah boy. I would with pleasure, but I am stonay."

Mellish sneered.

"Better say at once that you won't," he said. "I know you had a fiver yesterday, because I saw you take it out of the envelope."

D'Arcy jammed his monocle into his eye, and turned it upon Mellish with a fixed look.

"I twust, Mellish," he said, in measured tones—"I twust you do not doubt my word."

"Oh, no," said Mellish, retreating a pace hastily, "certainly not. But—but I don't see what you can have done with the fiver in the time."

"It is weally no biznay of yours, deah boy."

"N-no, but—"

"As a mattah of fact, it has been eaten up by wats," said D'Arcy. "I left it in my desk, and those wats have eaten it."

Mellish gave a whistle.

"More rats!" growled Blake. "I don't believe anything of the sort. More likely you forgot to put it there."

"I distinctly wemembah puttin' it there."

"Well, you oughtn't to put a fiver in a desk, and leave it unlocked," said Digby. "It was like a careless ass."

"How was I to know that Blake would be playin' the giddy ox?"

"Here, Lathom's gone; let's go and have a look," growled Blake. "I expect it's still there, and you've overlooked it."

Mr. Lathom was going down the passage. The chums of the Fourth made for the class-room door again, followed by Mellish. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther came along from the Shell-room, and met them at the doorway. They looked in surprise at Blake's worried brow, and the grave faces of the others.

"Anything wrong?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Gussy says the rats have gnawed up a fiver," growled Blake. "I believe he's talking out of his hat, as usual."

"Most likely."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"Let's go and see," said Tom Merry, pushing open the door of the Fourth-Form room. "Silly ass to leave a fiver in an unlocked desk, anyway!"

"Wats!"

Blake threw up the lid of D'Arcy's desk. There were plain traces of rats inside. The cloth bag Blake had carried them in was gnawed through, and a great deal of wood had been chewed by the rodents in their attempt to get out. The foolscap had been gnawed to rags in some places, and the books, too, had suffered. Blake turned out the contents of the desk, with a great deal of dust of gnawed paper and wood. But of the five-pound note there was no trace.

"Pway don't wowwy, deah boy!" said D'Arcy kindly. "It weally doesn't mattah! It only means bein' short of tin for a bit, and I don't mind."

Blake was examining the gnawed paper.

"I don't believe the fiver was here!" he exclaimed. "You put it somewhere else."

"Yaas, it was, deah boy. Now I wemembah, Dig was with me when I put it there, and he saw me lay the foolscap ovah it."

Digby nodded assent.

"I remember," he said.

Tom Merry looked curiously into the desk.

"Sure you didn't move it afterwards?" he asked.

"Quite sure, deah boy!"

"Well, if you didn't, someone did," said Tom decidedly. "I'll wager a footer against a pegtop that the rats never had it."

"Weally, Tom Mewwy—"

"What makes you think so?" asked Manners.

"The rats wouldn't eat it. Why should they? They were gnawing round on all sides, trying to find a way out, and they may have gnawed the banknote along with the other papers. But there would be some fragments of it left."

"Bai Jove!"

"Of course there would!" exclaimed Blake, with a look of great relief. "If they had scoffed the fiver, it stands to reason they would have left a rag or two of it among this dust. There isn't a fragment of banknote paper here; I know that."

"We could easily tell it, if there was," said Lowther. "Banknote paper is recognised easily enough. Let's look through the fragments."

"Bai Jove, you know, I nevah thought of that."

The juniors looked carefully through the gnawed fragments in the desk. But there was not the slightest scrap of bank-

note paper to be discovered. Had the rats eaten the whole of it, without leaving a vestige? It was unlikely—

"But," said D'Arcy, as they ceased to look, "if the wats didn't eat the banknote—"

"And they jolly well didn't!" said Tom Merry.

"Then where is it?"

CHAPTER 5.

Mellish Makes a Suggestion.

DEAD silence followed D'Arcy's question. It opened up a new aspect of the case.

The banknote had been in the desk, as D'Arcy declared, and as Dig declared, too. If the rats had not, indeed, disposed of it, where was it? It certainly was not there now.

Where was the banknote?

The juniors looked at each other, uneasiness growing in every face.

"Well, that's a blessed conundrum!" said Blake, at last. "I suppose Arthur Augustus Fathead D'Arcy removed it, and forgot all about it."

D'Arcy shook his head quietly.

"I did not, deah boy."

"Well, the rats didn't have it," said Mellish, in a rather loud voice. Mellish's eyes had a curious greenish glitter in them. The cad of the Fourth seemed to be thinking thoughts that afforded him a peculiar satisfaction.

"No, that seems clear," said Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus's brow clouded.

"But—but—Bai Jove!" he muttered. "If the wats didn't have it, you know, somebody must have taken it from the desk."

"Impossible!" said Tom Merry, his cheeks flushing. "Yaas, wathah; it seems to me imposs. The wats must have had it."

"Not likely," said Monty Lowther. "Some silly ass must have taken it for a joke."

"Wathah a wotten joke, I think, deah boy."

"Well, there's no other explanation."

"There might be," said Mellish.

Every eye was immediately turned on Mellish.

"What do you mean?" said Tom Merry, quietly. "Do you mean to say you think there's a thief in the School House?"

"I shouldn't like to say that. But it's no good blinking at facts. You know as well as I do that the rats didn't gnaw up the banknote without leaving a trace behind."

"Yes, but—"

"It looks to me as if somebody has taken it. No gammon, you know. You know perfectly well that it looks the same to you," said Mellish coolly.

"I hope not!"

"What's the good of hoping? It's the truth we want."

"I don't see what it's got to do with you, anyway," said Manners.

Mellish shrugged his shoulders.

"It's got to do with all of us if there's a thief in the School House," he said. "Of course, if you fellows want to hush it up—"

"Who wants to hush it up?"

"Well, let's have it out, then. It's easy enough to trace the chap who took it, if it was taken."

"How?" asked Tom Merry quietly, his eyes steadily fixed upon the face of the cad of the Fourth Form.

"Easily. Find out if any fellow who hadn't much money lately has become flush of tin," said Mellish. "That's the easy way. If a chap has stolen the fiver, I suppose it would be because he was in want of money."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, and he wouldn't keep it to use as a parlour ornament or a pipelight, would he? He would cash it, and spend the money."

"Yaas, that's so."

"So if you see a chap who was broke yesterday, and flush of money to-day, make him explain where the tin came from," said Mellish. "That's my idea!"

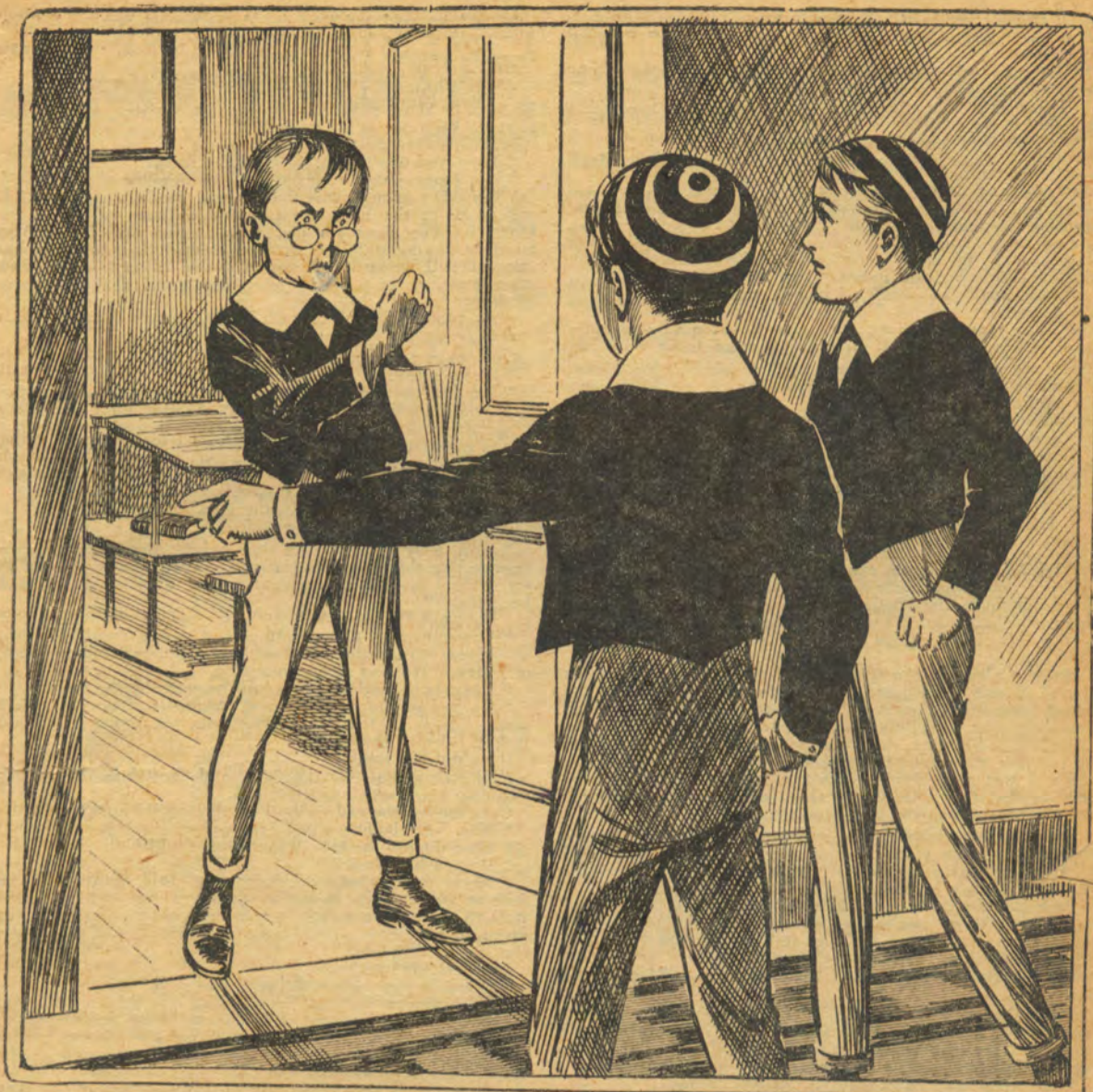
"It's not a bad idea," said Lowther. "I do believe Mellish has some underhand, caddish notion in suggesting it, but it's a good idea, all the same."

Mellish gave Lowther a venomous glance.

"If you find such a chap, as I've said, make him explain," he said. "If he can account for the money, look further. If he tells some cock-and-bull story to account for it, you'll know you've got him."

"There is weally somethin' in what Mellish says, deah boys. As you know, I have devoted a considerable amount of time to twainin' as an amateur detective, and that is weally the course I should map out for a beginnin'."

"What do you say, Blake?"



"I decline to leave the class-room," said Skimpole. "As a sincere Socialist, I claim the right to enter, stand, sit, or remain where I choose, when I choose, and how I choose!"

Jack Blake started out of a brown study.

"It's not for me to say anything," he said, in a low, bitter tone. "Can't you fellows see what Mellish is driving at?"

"No," said Tom Merry. "What do you mean?"

Blake smiled bitterly.

"I was stony yesterday, and flush of money to-day," he replied, "that's all."

"Pway don't be an ass, Blake. I suppose you don't think anybody would be ass enough to suspect you?"

"Mellish does."

Mellish shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't suspect anybody," he said. "As for what Blake says, I can only say, cap fit, cap wear. Blake has pointed out the fact, anyway, that he was stony yesterday and flush to-day. But, of course, he's had a remittance."

"I haven't had a remittance," said Blake.

"But you can explain how you got the money?"

"I won't explain to you," said Blake contemptuously. "You remember what I told you, you fellows. I found that sovereign in the lining of an old jacket."

"My dear chap, it's not necessary to explain to us," said Tom Merry. "Nobody would be idiotic enough to suspect you of boning another chap's tin. The only fellow here likely to do a thing of that sort is Mellish."

The cad of the Fourth turned almost green.

"You—you accuse me!"

"Nothing of the sort. But I won't allow you to make insinuations against a chap whose boots you're not fit to clean," said Tom Merry, his eyes flashing. "If I were Blake I'd kick you out of the room."

Mellish crossed promptly to the door.

"Oh, all right," he said. "I don't say anything, but the fellows will draw their own conclusions. I don't say Blake took the fiver, and changed it, and made up a yarn about getting a sov. out of the lining of an old jacket."

"Get out, you cad!"

"I'm going. I don't say, either, that Blake shoved the rats in the desk to make people think they had gnawed up the fiver, to cover his tracks. Other fellows may say it."

Blake drew a deep breath.

"You cad!" yelled Digby.

He ran towards Mellish. The junior dodged out of the door and ran, slamming it behind him. By the time Digby got out into the passage, Mellish was out of sight.

Digby returned wrathful into the Form-room. Blake was standing by the open desk, looking pale and worried.

"Don't be an ass, old chap," Tom Merry said, awkwardly. "It's rotten, I know. But we all know Mellish is a low cad, and nobody at St. Jim's will listen to him."

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NEXT
THURSDAY

"THE TERRIBLE THREE'S TOUR." By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Blake nodded without speaking.
"I shall make it a point to thrash Mellish," D'Arcy remarked.

"But somebody took the fiver," said Jack quietly. "Dig says he saw Gussy put it in the desk."

"Yes, I did," said Dig, miserably. "He put it there right enough."

"And Gussy is sure he never moved it?"
"Yaas, I must say I am sure on that point, Blake, deah boy."

"Then it's been taken. You fellows all think that the rats couldn't have gnawed it up without leaving a trace behind."

"Well, one can't be sure," said Lowther. "Of course, the rats may have eaten it."

Blake shook his head.
"I don't think so myself," he said. "The rats would have left a fragment or two. No. The banknote was taken from the desk."

"I can't believe that there's a thief in the School House," said Tom Merry, shaking his head decidedly.

"It's barely possible that some ass has taken it for a joke, just to frighten Gussy," said Digby. "It's not likely, but it's possible."

"We'll find out," said Manners.
"Yaas, wathah!"

And, with decidedly gloomy faces, the juniors quitted the Form-room.

CHAPTER 6.

Gore Declines.

GORE, of the Shell, sat in his study.
The big, burly fellow, who had been called the bully of the Shell, but who had of late less and less deserved that title, sat in the armchair, his feet on the fender, his hands in his pockets, staring at the fire, and thinking.

He was alone in the study. Skimpole, with whom he shared it, was out somewhere, explaining to the fags of the Third the benefits that would accrue to the community when Socialism was established—that desirable event being due, according to Skimmy, shortly after the publication of a book he was now writing on the subject.

There was a cheerful fire in the grate, and it was very cosy in the study. Gore was thinking, and there was, for once, a pleasant expression upon his face.

Gore had found life much pleasanter of late at St. Jim's. Since the time when he had been "sacked," Gore had tried to turn over a new leaf; and, like most fellows who try hard enough, he had succeeded to a great extent.

And friendly looks from fellows whose friendship was of value seemed an ample compensation for the lack of his former amusements of kicking and cuffing the fags, and playing ill-natured tricks upon all and sundry.

Gore started as the door of the study was suddenly flung open.

He looked round. Mellish, of the Fourth, came in hurriedly, and closed the door behind him. He came over towards Gore with a flush on his face, and a sparkle in his eyes. He was evidently labouring under great excitement.

Gore stared at him excitedly. Mellish grinned.
"News!" he exclaimed.

"Oh!" said Gore, without much interest. Mellish had been his chum, but their relations had been decidedly strained of late. The coldness was growing on Gore's part, much to the amazement of Mellish, who simply couldn't understand it.

That Gore was really desirous of leading a better life Mellish did not believe for a moment. He had never felt any such desire himself, and he did not credit it in another. He only imagined that Gore was playing some "little game," though why, for what object, Mellish had to confess that he was not keen enough to guess.

"It's good news," said Mellish—"for us, I mean!"

"How—for us?"
Mellish lowered his voice.

"Look here, Gore, it's about time you let me into the secret, you know!"

The Shell fellow stared at him.
"I don't understand you," he said.

"Oh, you know what I mean, well enough!" said Mellish impatiently. "You can take in Tom Merry and the rest with this goody-goody business, you know, but you can't pull the wool over my eyes. I'm too fly."

Gore's eyes gleamed.
"Is that so?"

"Well, rather!" said Mellish, with emphasis. "I can't quite see what your little game is, but of course, you don't expect me to believe the thing's genuine?"

Gore shook his head.

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NEXT THURSDAY: "THE TERRIBLE THREE'S TOUR."  MARTIN CLIFFORD

"No," he said quietly; "I don't expect you to believe it's genuine. So long as Tom Merry and the others believe it's genuine, that's enough for me."

"Good! You admit it's a little game?"

"No, I don't. I don't want to talk to you about it, Mellish, or about anything else for that matter. I'd be glad if you'd keep out of my study."

Mellish's eyes glittered.
"Then you don't want to hear the news?"

"Not particularly. I expect it's some more of your rot."

"It's right enough this time!" said Mellish eagerly. "I was there in the Form-room, and saw them. Look here, Gore, we were both up against Blake and his friends, as hard as we could be before you started this new wheeze. Blessed if I know what you're doing it for! But that doesn't matter now. Look here, here's our chance against Blake."

"Against Blake?"
"Yes. He's a thief!"

Gore gave a jump.
"Blake a thief! Are you mad?"

"No, I'm not; though Blake must have been to take the banknote," said Mellish coolly. "He put some rats into D'Arcy's desk, and they gnawed up a lot of things, and Blake hoped the fellows would believe they had gnawed up the banknote among other things. See?"

Gore rose to his feet.

"Do you mean to say D'Arcy is missing a banknote?"

"Yes. It was taken from his desk—a fiver."

"Taken! Are you sure?"

"Well, they all agree on that point. Even Blake's own friends say that the rats couldn't possibly have gnawed it up without leaving a fragment behind to show that it had been there."

"But—but Blake—"

"You remember him standing treat to-day?" said Mellish, with great satisfaction. "That was out of the stolen money, of course. He was stony yesterday."

"I expect he could explain how he came by the tin."

"He has explained," grinned Mellish; "but it won't wash. Says he found a sovereign in the lining of an old jacket. Pretty thick—eh?"

Gore did not reply.

"Of course, he stole the fiver, and shoved in the rats to cover up his tracks," said Mellish.

Gore looked the cad of the Fourth steadily in the eyes.

"You don't believe that!" he said.

"How do you know? Why shouldn't I?"

"Do you believe it?"

"Never mind whether I do or not," said Mellish. "The fellows will believe it easily enough if we push the yarn well. Can't you see that this is our chance to pull Blake down off his perch. He'll never get over this if we handle the matter all right."

Gore set his lips hard.

"What do you suggest doing?" he asked.

"Now you're talking!" exclaimed Mellish, with great satisfaction. "Of course, I knew you were only humbugging all the time. It's easy enough for us—easy as rolling off a log. I'll manage it in the Fourth, and you in the Shell. We'll spread the yarn all over the House, and let the New House hear of it, too. Figgins & Co., of the New House, will take it up, and there will be no end of a row. We'll make the juniors demand a general inquiry—a House committee to look into the matter."

"And then?"

"Well, that will be pretty rough on those rotters, for a start," said Mellish, with a grin. "You see, it's D'Arcy's banknote, and Blake's stolen it, that will make trouble in

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Study No. 6 itself. We'll have Blake up before a meeting of the juniors, and make him explain, and make D'Arcy accuse him."

"Anything else?"

"Well, if we make fuss enough, it will get to the doctor's ears at the finish, and he will inquire into the matter."

"And then?"

"I don't see how Blake can avoid being sacked from the school."

"Sacked!" said Gore, with a start.

"Certainly! The Head sacked you for imitating a fellow's hand in a letter, for a jape. He let you come back; but he wouldn't let a thief come back. If we work this well, Blake will be kicked out of St. Jim's."

"If we work it well," said Gore thoughtfully.

"Exactly!"

Gore crossed the room to where a dog-whip hung on the wall, and took it down. He rang the lash in the air with a sharp crack. Mellish watched him in wonder.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"I'm going to show you how I appreciate your suggestion," said Gore.

"Look here! I——"

Mellish made a wild spring for the door. But Gore was too quick for him. His powerful hand was on the Fourth-Former's collar, and Mellish was swung back into the study. He gave a yell as Gore whirled him across the room.

"Stop! Oh! Ow! Yow!"

Lash, lash, lash!

The dog-whip lashed round Mellish's body and legs till he shrieked and yelled with pain. He tried to jerk himself loose, but in vain. Gore's grip on his collar was like iron. Mellish shrieked and struggled and yelled. And still the lash rose and fell.

"You cad!" gasped Gore, breathless with his exertions. "You cowardly worm! You rat! Take that, and that, and that! You worm!"

"Ow! Leggo! Yaroo!"

"And that, and that, and that!"

"Help! Murder! Yow!"

The door of the study opened. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, stared angrily in. He looked in amazement at the scene before him.

"Gore!" he almost shouted.

Gore released Mellish, who shrank, whining and blubbering, into a corner. The big Sixth-Former fixed his eyes sternly on Gore.

"Gore, you are bullying again, then!"

Gore did not reply. He hung up the dog-whip, and then stood before the captain of the school, silent, breathing hard.

Kildare's scornful eyes ran over him as he stood.

"I thought I saw a change in you for the better, Gore," he said. "I suppose the lesson you got by being expelled has worn off."

Gore winced.

"Why were you thrashing Mellish in that brutal manner?" demanded Kildare.

"He knows," said Gore.

"I—I don't!" gasped Mellish. "I—I never did anything. I——"

"You will have to be cured of your bullying, Gore, whether Mellish did anything to provoke you or not," said Kildare curtly. "Follow me!"

Gore followed him downstairs without a word.

Mr. Railton, the House-master of the School House, was standing at the door of his study, evidently waiting for Kildare. The noise made by Mellish had reached his ears.

"Well, Kildare?"

"It was Gore, sir, at his old tricks."

Mr. Railton turned a stern brow upon Gore.

"I thought so! Have you any excuse to make, Gore?"

Gore hesitated.

"Come into my study," said the House-master.

Gore followed him in. Mr. Railton picked up a cane, and faced the bully of the Shell with a clear, scornful glance.

"Well, Gore, have you anything to say?"

"N-no, sir."

"Then hold out your hand."

There were six cuts for Gore, and he took them without a word. Then he quietly left the House-master's study. He left Mr. Railton with a somewhat puzzled expression on his face. Mr. Railton could not quite make Gore out.

CHAPTER 7. Mellish is Hurt.

"SAY, Blake!"

"Hallo!"

"Will you lend me a few bobs till Saturday?"

"Sorry, I can't."

"Oh, come off!" said Mellish urgently. "I am hard up, you know, and I always pay my debts."

Jack Blake shook his head.

He was standing in the doorway of the School House, looking out into the sunny quad, but his brow was not sunny.

The face that was usually one of the most cheerful at St. Jim's was darkly clouded over. Jack Blake had a weight on his mind.

The banknote that had disappeared from D'Arcy's desk was a nightmare to him. It was the next day now, and nothing had been heard of the banknote.

It had not turned up, as Blake had hoped against hope that it would.

What had become of it?

The rats had almost certainly not destroyed it. It must have been taken from the desk. Who had taken it?

Was there a thief in the School House? It seemed impossible. And yet——

Mellish was eyeing Blake narrowly. Kildare, the captain of St. Jim's, was standing near at hand, talking to Darrel, of the Sixth. Both the seniors were near enough to hear what the juniors said.

As yet, the affair of the banknote, widely discussed among the juniors, had not reached the ears of the Upper Forms.

But Mellish was fully determined that it should.

He had an opportunity now of wreaking his long-desired vengeance upon the fellows who had treated him with the contempt he deserved, and he was not likely to allow it to pass.

"Look here, Blake——"

Blake turned to him impatiently. He did not like Mellish, and he knew that Mellish suspected him, or affected to suspect him, of taking the banknote.

"Look here, Mellish," he exclaimed, "I can't lend you any money, so let me alone. And don't speak to me—I don't like it."

Mellish shrugged his shoulders.

"You ought to be jolly glad to get somebody to speak to you, under the circumstances," he said, with a sneer.

Jack Blake faced him with flashing eyes, his fists clenching convulsively.

"What do you mean, Mellish?"

The cad of the Fourth gave another shrug.

"You jolly well know what I mean."

"I don't!"

"And as for being short of money, you jolly well know where to get it when you want it," said Mellish.

Blake's chest heaved.

"That can only mean one thing," he said.

"Take it as you like."

"You cowardly worm!" said Blake. "You know—you must know that I never touched Gussy's banknote."

Mellish sneered.

"As for your speaking to me," went on Blake, "if I were a thief, I should feel ashamed of being on speaking terms with a fellow like you."

"You won't be on speaking terms with any fellow at St. Jim's, I expect, soon."

"Put up your hands, Mellish."

"Not here."

"Yes, here and now. Put them up!"

"I won't. I——"

Smack!

"Will you put them up now?" shouted Blake.

Mellish reeled back from the sounding smack from Blake's open palm.

The cad of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's was little gifted with courage, but even he could not take that "lying down."

He put up his hands, feeling a little braver than usual from the knowledge that two prefects were close at hand, and would certainly not permit a fight to continue in the House hall.

Kildare and Darrel turned round and stared in amazement at the juniors. Blake was hitting out furiously. He received Mellish's taps without even noticing them, and landed out right and left in return.

In three seconds Mellish was lying on the floor, feeling as if an earthquake had happened, and he had been in the midst of it.

"Stop that!" roared Kildare.

He strode to the spot, and grasped Blake by the shoulder. "Here you young sweep! What do you mean by fighting here?"

Blake panted for breath.

"I'd fight anybody—anywhere—who called me a thief!"

"What?"

Mellish staggered to his feet. His face was sickly in hue, between fear and rage, and the dark bruises on it showed up blackly against the skin.

Kildare released Blake, and turned a stern glance on the cad of the Fourth.

"Did you call Blake a thief, Mellish?"

"No."

"Well, he implied it," said Blake; "that's enough."

"It's a guilty conscience," sneered Mellish.

Blake made a fierce step forward, but Darrel caught him by the shoulder.

"Hold on, Blake!"

"You heard what he said."

"Keep your temper, lad."

"What does this mean?" said Kildare sternly. "What was that about a banknote, too? Tell me what it means, Blake. Is a banknote missing?"

"Yes."

"Whom does it belong to?"

"D'Arcy."

"He has lost it?"

"I don't know."

"It was taken from his desk," said Mellish. "Blake went to his desk, and put some rats in it. Then D'Arcy missed the banknote, and Blake started a yarn that the rats must have eaten it."

"You lying cad!" broke in Blake savagely. "I said from the first that I didn't think the rats had eaten it."

Mellish shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I dare say you can vary the yarn to suit yourself," he said. "Anyway, the banknote's gone, and Blake was in funds immediately afterwards, though he had been stony before."

"I suppose he received a remittance," said Darrel.

Mellish chuckled.

"Ask him."

"I found a sovereign in the lining of an old jacket," said Blake; and his voice faltered, and he turned red as he spoke. He realised how weak the explanation must seem, under the circumstances.

Kildare looked at him curiously.

"Anybody see you find it?" he asked.

"No; I was alone at the time."

"It's unfortunate. And nothing has been seen of D'Arcy's banknote?"

"Nothing."

"Well, you'd better all look for it. I've no doubt it will turn up. I know that D'Arcy is very careless with his money. As for you, Mellish," went on the captain of St. Jim's sternly, "you had better be careful what you say. You implied, if you did not say, that Blake had taken the banknote."

"Well, it looks like it, doesn't it?"

"Never mind what it looks like. I know perfectly well that Blake is not a thief. There is no fellow in the School House I would not sooner suspect."

The tears started to Blake's eyes.

He was feeling so downhearted and miserable, and reading or imagining suspicion in every face, and those words of confidence went straight to his heart.

"Thank you, Kildare," he faltered. "I—I give you my word that I don't know anything about the banknote."

"I'm sure you don't, Blake."

"And I'm sure of it, too," said Darrel. "It's absurd to suppose for a moment that Blake would have touched it."

"Well, I only say what it looks like," mumbled Mellish.

"Be careful what you say, that's all," said Kildare.

"Mind, if I catch you spreading any caddish foolery of this sort about the school, I shall make it warm for you."

"I—I—"

"Oh, get away!"

Mellish walked away, gritting his teeth. Kildare dropped his hand upon Blake's shoulder.

"Don't be downhearted, kid. I know this will turn out all right."

"Thank you, Kildare," faltered the junior. "It's—it's awfully decent of you to stand by a chap like this."

"I know you are too decent to touch anybody else's money, Blake, that's all. I hope the banknote will turn up soon."

And Kildare strolled away with Darrel.

He left Blake feeling much lighter-hearted. But there was still a weight upon the boy's mind. Where, after all, was the banknote?

were in the study. They had been discussing the missing banknote, and trying to form some theory to account for its mysterious disappearance from D'Arcy's desk.

But they forgot even the banknote as the door of the study opened and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came in.

The swell of St. Jim's presented an unusual and startling sight.

Usually D'Arcy's appearance was almost overflowing with elegance, and dandies in the Sixth Form had given up the attempt to tie their neckties as D'Arcy tied his, and to wear their clothes with such absolute elegance.

But where was D'Arcy's elegance now?

The perfectly-fitting Etons were baggy and dusty. The jacket was ripped up at the back. The collar was torn out, and hanging by a single stud. The necktie was streaming over D'Arcy's left shoulder.

There was a cut on his lip, and a bruise round his right eye, which showed the strongest possible symptoms of closing.

The chums of the Fourth stared at him in blank amazement.

"Gussy!"

"Gussy!"

"Gussy!"

"Do I look vewy wotten, deah boys?" asked Arthur Augustus anxiously.

"My only Panama hat!" ejaculated Blake. "Rotten! That isn't the word! Look in the glass."

D'Arcy crossed to the mantelpiece.

"Bai Jove!"

"How on earth did you get like that, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove! I am afraid I do look wathah wotten."

"How did you get like that? Have you been fighting?" demanded Digby.

"Well, as a mattah of fact, deah boy, I shouldn't be likely to get like this unless I had been fightin'," said Arthur Augustus.

He tried to jam his monocle into his eye as usual, but failed in the attempt. The bruise round the eye prevented the rim from fitting in its usual place.

"Bai Jove!"

"What's happened?"

"Whom have you been fighting with, you naughty boy?" demanded Digby, in a tone of great severity.

"I wefuse to be chawactewised as a naughty boy, Dig."

"What was the row about?" asked Blake.

"The wow, deah boy?"

"Yes, the row. What was it about?"

"About, deah boy?"

"Yes, ass—"

"I wefuse to be called an ass."

"You utter duffer."

"I decline to be addressed as a duffah."

"What was the row about?" shrieked Blake. "Why can't you explain?"

"Explain?"

"Yes, explain. E X P L A I N—explain!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Do you know what the word means, or shall I get a dictionary and expound it to you?"

"I am quite aware what the word means, Blake."

"Then why don't you explain?"

"Explain what?"

"What you've been scrapping about."

"Oh, weally, you see—"

"What on earth's the giddy mystery?" demanded Digby.

"Why can't you tell us what you've been fighting about?"

"Well, you see—"

"Well, whom have you been fighting with?" asked Herries.

"There was Mellish first—"

"Mellish!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Anybody else?"

"Yaas, Skeet of the Fourth."

"What on earth were you fighting with Skeet for?"

"Well, you see—"

"Anybody else?" asked Dig, as Gussy hesitated.

"Yes, wathah! There was Preece of the New House."

"My hat! You've been having a warm time!" exclaimed Blake, in wonder. "I never knew you were such a quarrelsome chap, Gussy."

"I am not a quawwelsome chap, deah boy."

"Did you fight them one at a time or all at once?" asked Digby.

"One at a time."

"And they all licked you, I suppose?"

Again D'Arcy tried to jam his monocle into his eye to give Dig a withering glare, and again he failed in the attempt.

"They did not lick me," he said, with dignity.

"Then you licked them?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

CHAPTER 8.

D'Arcy Declines to Explain.

"MY only hat!"
"Great Scott!"
"Phew!"

The three ejaculations were fired off like crackers at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy as he came into Study No. 6. Afternoon school was over, and Blake, Herries, and Digby were in the library.—No. 104.

NEXT

THURSDAY: "THE TERRIBLE THREE'S TOUR."

By
ARTIN CLIFFORD



"Well Tackled!" (This depicts an exciting incident in the grand double-length School Tale of Harry Wharton & Co., contained in the special number of "THE MAGNET" LIBRARY. Now on Sale. Price One Penny.)

"It was a dwawn battle with Hancock, I think, and honahs were easy as wegards Weilly," said Arthur Augustus. "I licked the othahs."

"My only hat! What on earth have you been fighting with Hancock and Reilly for?"

"Weilly made an impertinent wemark concernin' the state of my wight eye, and Hancock giggled in a wude mannah."

"And the others?"

"The othahs?"

"Yes, ass!"

"I have pointed out to you before, Blake, that I absolutely decline to be called an ass. I should be sowwy to have to thwash you affah thwashin' those wottahs—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I twust you will not dwive me to it."

"You haven't explained yet how you came to be fighting with Mellish, and Skeet, and Preece," said Digby.

"Bai Jove, I feel wathah wotten!"

"Is it a secret, then?"

"Not exactly a secwet, deah boy."

"Then explain."

"I wondah whethah this bwuise will go down before to-morrow?" said Arthur Augustus, anxiously surveying his darkened eye in the glass.

"If you don't jolly well explain yourself quick you will have another optio to match it," said Blake darkly.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Tell us what the row was about."

"Undah the cires, I must wefuse to yield to thweats."

"You utter ass—"

"I decline—"

"Oh, go and eat coke!" said Blake. "I never knew such an ass! You'd better go and borrow some beefsteak to shove on that eye, or it will be the size of an onion by the morning."

"Yaas, wathah! That's a wathah good idea."

And D'Arcy left the study.

The chums of the Fourth looked at one another in wonder.

"What on earth has he been up to?" exclaimed Blake. "Gussy isn't usually the kind of chap to get into five quarrels on a single evening."

"Blessed if I don't go and look into the matter!" said Dig.

"You coming?"

Blake shook his head.

"No; I'll stay here."

Jack Blake had stayed in his study a great deal that day. He felt an uncomfortable sense of being suspected when he was among his schoolfellows. In his study, at least, he was safe from curious glances and sly innuendoes. Digby understood, and he left the study with a nod, leaving Blake chatting with Herries over the fire and the roasted chestnuts.

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NEXT THURSDAY: "THE TERRIBLE THREE'S TOUR." By **MARTIN CLIFFORD.**

CHAPTER 9.
Signs of Battle.

DIGBY was absent from the study ten minutes. Jack Blake glanced round when the door opened, and gave a whoop of astonishment. Herries stared as if his eyes would bulge out of his head.

Digby had left the study looking very neat and clean, as usual. He returned to it in a state more woeful than Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's.

His nose was red and swollen, his cheek bruised, his left eye closed, his hair tousled, and his clothes covered with dust. He came in quietly, and dropped into his chair with a gasp. His chums stared at him blankly.

"My only hat!" ejaculated Blake. "What the—what the—"

"What's happened?" gasped Herries.

"Nothing!"

"Nothing! What do you mean?"

"Oh, I had a little row."

"With whom?"

"Well, I've had a tussle with three or four fellows," said Digby. "It's all right. I gave as good as I got."

"But what was it about?"

"About?" stammered Digby.

"Yes. What have you been fighting for?"

"Oh, it was a sort of argument."

"Blessed if you're not as mysterious as Gussy!" exclaimed Jack Blake. "Why on earth can't you explain yourself?"

"Well, you see—"

"You've been quarrelling with somebody?"

"Ye-e-es."

"What was the cause?"

"The cause?"

"Yes, the cause!" howled Blake.

"You see—you see—er—"

"You silly ass! You're as big a duffer as Gussy! What's gone wrong in the School House this evening?" exclaimed Blake, exasperated.

"Nothing, but—"

"Oh, you make me tired!"

"It's all right," said Digby. "I had a little dust-up over a difference of opinion with some fellows."

"Rats!"

"That's what it was, really."

"What was the difference of opinion about?" asked Herries.

"Oh, nothing in particular."

Blake and Herries looked at one another. They could not understand it in the least. First D'Arcy and then Digby had returned to the study in this state, and declined to explain how it came about.

Herries rose from his chair.

"For goodness' sake go and see what's the matter!" exclaimed Blake. "I shall think the fellows are all off their chumps soon."

"What-ho!" said Herries.

He quitted Study No. 6. Digby dusted and brushed himself down, and restored himself to as much tidiness as possible. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy re-entered the study, looking somewhat improved in appearance.

He had changed his clothes, but he could not change his skin, and the dark bruises showed up with startling distinctness upon his face.

"Do I look vewy wotten now, deah boys?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, rather!" said Blake. "Your own mother wouldn't know you, and your Cousin Ethel wouldn't be seen out with you."

"Weally, Blake—"

"You look a perfect horror!"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"I'm blessed if I think we ought to allow you in a respectable study," said Blake. "People seeing you come in and out will think we're a lot of rowdy hooligans."

"Weally—"

The door opened, and Herries came in.

He sank down in the nearest chair, gasping.

His collar was torn out, his clothes were in disorder, his nose was streaming red, and there was a bruise under his eye.

Blake stared at him, almost petrified.

"Herries!"

"Oh!"

"What's the matter?"

"Oh!"

"My only hat! Have you been fighting, too?"

"Ow!"

Herries, Digby, and D'Arcy looked at one another. Blake stared at all three in blank wonder and astonishment.

"What on earth's the matter?" he exclaimed. "Whom have you been fighting with, Herries?"

"Oh, some of the fellows."

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NEXT THURSDAY: "THE TERRIBLE THREE'S TOUR." By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"What about?"

"A-a-a-about?"

"Yes, duffer! What about?"

"Oh, a—a—a difference of opinion."

"Well, of all the frabjous asses I think you three take the biscuit!" said Blake wrathfully.

"Well, you see—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"It's like this—"

"Oh, don't talk to me!" said Blake crossly. "You make me tired!"

"Weally, deah boy—"

"Hallo! Who's that? Come in!"

There was a tap at the door.

In response to Blake's invitation, the door was opened, and three juniors entered the study.

They were the Terrible Three!

The Terrible Three were not dandies at any time, but they were usually neat and clean; but they were not looking neat and clean at the present moment.

Each of them bore the signs of recent warfare, in torn collars, bruised faces, and tousled hair.

Jack Blake simply stared.

"Tom Merry! Have you been fighting, too?"

Tom Merry coloured.

"Well, I had a little row with a chap."

"And you, Lowther?"

"Well, you see," said Lowther hesitatingly, "I had a difference of opinion with a chap in the Fifth."

"And you, Manners?"

"It was a-a-a-a little dust-up," said Manners.

"I suppose the whole blessed House is going off its dot," said Blake. "I presume you can't explain what the row was about, any more than these duffers here."

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy!"

"I wefuse to wing off. I—"

"Shut up! What was the row about, Tom Merry?"

"Oh, just a row, you know," said Tom vaguely.

"Well, of all the asses—"

There was a knock at the door again.

"Come in!" rapped out Blake crossly.

But the door did not open.

Instead, a slip of paper was pushed underneath, and there was a sound of retreating footsteps in the passage.

The juniors stared at the paper.

Why anybody should take that method of communicating with the occupants of the study was a mystery to them.

"I suppose it's a note for one of us," said Blake, at last.

"Pick it up, Gussy!"

"Wight-ho, deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus picked up the paper. There was a single word scrawled on it, and D'Arcy's face went crimson as he read it. He crushed the note savagely in his hand.

"What is it?" asked Blake.

"Oh, nothin' in particular, deah boy!"

"Show it to me."

"It wouldn't intwest you, Blake."

"Do you mean that it's a note for you?"

"Oh, no, not exactly."

"Then show it to me, ass!"

"I would wathah not."

"What do you mean? Why?"

"It's a piece of wotten cheek, that's all."

"Show it to me!"

Blake's manner was imperative. Arthur Augustus hesitated for a moment, and then slowly and reluctantly opened out the paper. The juniors looked at it, and Blake's face went white as he read what was written there.

It was one word.

Thief!

CHAPTER 10.

Skimpole Offers His Services.

JACK BLAKE dropped the paper. There was a painful silence in the study.

It was Tom Merry who broke it.

"Chuck that thing into the fire, somebody!"

Herries picked up the paper, and threw it into the fire. It flared up and burnt.

"Don't take any notice of that, Blake."

Blake nodded without replying.

"It's a cad's trick," said Tom Merry. "The rotter who shoved that under the door was afraid to show his face."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Blake nodded again.

He did not speak.

The junior, who was usually as keen as steel, and had all his wits about him, seemed to be stunned and dazed.

"That's really what we came about," said Tom Merry uncomfortably. "We want to speak to you about the matter, Blake. We think it ought to be looked into."

"Yes."

Blake's voice was hoarse and strained.

"I suppose that's what you chaps have been fighting about?" he asked, after a pause.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, you see," said Tom Merry, "we agreed that if any chap hinted that you took the banknote, we would thump him at once, and try to knock a little sense into him; and a lot of chaps hinted it, so—"

"So there were wows."

"Exactly!"

"That's how it was," said Herries. "A Fifth-Form chap said so in my hearing, and I let him have it under the chin. Of course, I was licked."

"You acted quite rightly, Hewwies, and I approve of your conduct absolutely."

"But it's no good punching fellows' heads," said Manners. "You can't convince them that way. What's really needed is to find out what really became of that blessed banknote."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"What did become of it?" said Blake helplessly. "It's disappeared."

"It must be found."

"I suppose somebody took it," said Tom Merry. "We seem to be agreed that the rats couldn't have eaten it without leaving some fragments behind."

"That's extremely pwob, anyway."

"Then who took it?"

"Blessed if I can guess."

"There's not a fellow in the School House I should like to suspect of being a thief," said Tom Merry. "Mellish is the meanest rotter; but I hardly think he would steal; besides, he's too cunning. He knows that a note could be traced by the number, and he would be afraid to try to pass it."

"I don't think it was Mellish."

"Then who?"

"I don't know."

"That's the hardest point," said Lowther. "The chap who took it may be afraid to pass it, because of the number

being known, and he may keep it back for weeks, or perhaps never have the nerve to pass it. And all the time—"

"All the time I shall be suspected of being a thief," said Blake bitterly.

"Not by any chap whose opinion is worth having," said Tom Merry, quickly. "Hallo, who's that?"

There was a tap at the door, and it opened, and Gore of the Shell came in. Gore was looking very disturbed.

Blake's eyes blazed at once.

He had always been on the worst of terms with Gore, and the thought naturally flashed into his mind now that the Shell fellow had come there to taunt him.

"What do you want here, Gore?" he exclaimed abruptly.

Gore coloured.

"I want to speak to you chaps," he said, slowly and awkwardly.

"Well, you can speak, I suppose."

"It's about that—that affair."

"What affair?"

"The banknote."

Blake clenched his hands convulsively.

"Well, what about it?"

"I—I only wanted to say that—"

"Get it out!"

"That I don't believe you took it, and wouldn't believe it, even if it were found in your pocket," said Gore. "I don't know whether you care for my opinion, but there it is. I know you didn't take it."

Blake's expression changed.

"Thank you, Gore!" he said.

"And I—I wanted to say, too, that if I could do anything to help you clear up the matter, I would," said Gore.

"It's awfully decent of you," said Tom Merry. "We were just having a little jaw on the subject when you came in. We—"

The door opened again, interrupting Tom Merry.

A large head, ornamented with tufts of hair and a pair of big spectacles, was projected into the study.

Skimpole blinked at the juniors in his benevolent way.

"Ah, I see you are all here!" he said. "I want to speak to you. It's about Blake having taken that banknote."

In a moment there was a grip on the back of Skimpole's

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collar, and he was on his knees, and Digby and Herries were holding him there, while D'Arcy picked up a cricket-stump out of the cupboard.

Skimpole blinked up at the juniors in great amazement and alarm.

"Really, you fellows——"

D'Arcy grasped the cricket-stump.

Skimpole was favourably placed for a castigation, and Arthur Augustus began to castigate with a hearty goodwill.

Thwack! Thwack! Thwack!

"Ow, ow, ow!" roared Skimpole.

"There!" said D'Arcy. "Will you apologise, you wotah?"

"Really, D'Arcy——"

Thwack! Thwack! Thwack!

"Ow, yow, yow!"

"You howlid wotah, pway don't make that wot in our studay, it offends my eahs!" said D'Arcy.

"Ow! Yowah!"

"Bai Jove, he's gettin' worse!"

"Yaroo!"

"Have you had enough?"

"Ow! I consider that question absurd, D'Arcy. I have had more than enough. I do not like it at all. Pray leave off immediately."

"Then you will apologise to Blake?"

"I am unconscious of having given Blake any cause of offence, but I will apologise with pleasure, if Blake wishes it!" gasped Skimpole.

"Then you can get up, you howlin' duffah!"

Skimpole staggered to his feet. He blinked round at a circle of unsympathetic faces.

"Dear me!" he ejaculated. "I came here with the most friendly intentions, and I have been treated in a way that I can only consider almost rude."

"Bai Jove!"

"I came here to offer my services to help Blake. I——"

"Then you had a vewy unfortunate way of expvessin' yourself," said Arthur Augustus. "You were vewy lucky not to get a feahful thwashin'."

"Really, D'Arcy——"

"Oh, buzz off, Skimmy; we're busy," said Tom Merry brusquely.

The amateur Socialist of St. Jim's blinked at him.

"Really, Merry, I have come here upon an important matter. As you know, I am now engaged upon a book on the subject of evolution, which will fix the period of the origin of the human race on this planet within a margin of fifteen million years—a degree of exactitude which science has never reached before."

"There's the door, Skimmy."

"I had, however, quitted this important work for the purpose of writing an article on Socialism for the forthcoming number of Tom Merry's 'Weekly.'"

"Never mind the 'Weekly' now, Skimmy. Buzz off!"

"I have now quitted my article for the 'Weekly' in the middle to help Blake in this matter," said Skimpole. "You may remember that I have had considerable practice and experience as an amateur detective."

"Great Scott!"

"I am willing to place my services at Blake's disposal," said Skimpole, pulling out an enormous notebook and a blue pencil. "I shall be glad of a few details."

"Ass!"

"Pray acquaint me with all you know of the matter," said Skimpole, in his best Sherlock Holmes manner. "You can speak quite freely to me."

"You howlid duffer!"

"Really, Blake, I came here to assist you. In the first place, you must treat a detective with absolute confidence. Did you or did you not take the banknote?"

"Outside!"

"I require a few details——"

"Travel!"

"If you did not take the banknote——"

"Bunk!"

"Yes, but——"

"Oh, kick him out!"

Violent hands were laid upon the amateur detective of St. Jim's.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy opened the door, and Tom Merry and Lowther ejected Skimpole.

The genius of the Shell sat down in the passage with a bump, and his notebook and pencil were hurled after him. Then the door of the study was slammed.

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CHAPTER 11.

Troubles of an Amateur Detective.

SKIMPOLE staggered to his feet. He was feeling hurt.

On a good many previous occasions he had shown his wonderful abilities as an amateur detective, but somehow he had never been fully appreciated.

He adjusted his spectacles, and gathered up his notebook and pencil, and gasped for breath.

"Dear me!" he murmured. "This is very rude, and very stupid, too, as I could prove Blake's guilt or innocence, as the case may be, and save a great deal of uncertainty. I shall, however, look into the case on my own responsibility, without troubling about Blake's concurrence."

And Skimpole sought a quiet spot, where he could turn the matter over in his mind.

It was dusk in the wide, green quadrangle of St. Jim's, and most of the fellows had come in or were coming in.

Skimpole sat on the stone balustrade outside the great door, and there he wrinkled up his big forehead till it was deeply corrugated, and thought over the matter.

Three youths came up the steps, and they paused for a moment to look at Skimpole.

They were Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn of the New House—generally known as Figgins & Co.

"Hallo!" said Figgins. "Where's Blake?"

Skimpole started out of a reverie.

"Blake? Did you say Blake?"

"Yes, Blake."

"Ah, Blake!"

"What are you mooning about?" asked Kerr kindly. "Anything gone wrong with your rocker?"

"Certainly not, Kerr. As for Blake, I am afraid he is in a dangerous position."

"Phew! What's the matter?"

"Upon the whole, things look very black against him."

"Oh!" said Figgins. "You mean about the banknote?"

"Exactly."

"We've come over to see him about that," said Figgins.

"What-ho!" said Fatty Wynn. "We've licked four chaps in the New House for saying that Blake took the banknote, and we're ready to lick forty, if necessary."

"Just so!" said Kerr.

Skimpole shook his head sadly.

"That is very generous of you," he remarked; "but I'm afraid the case looks very black against Blake. I have taken the case up professionally, you see, and I have brought my trained intellect to bear on the subject."

"Your trained which?"

"Intellect."

"Rats! You haven't any!"

"Really, Figgins——"

"And what fatheaded conclusions have you come to?"

asked Kerr disdainfully.

Skimpole blinked at his notebook by the light from the hall window.

"It looks very black against Blake. You see, I proceed on the methods of the most successful detective of modern times. If a case was obvious, Sherlock Holmes refused to take it up. It was only a very deep and intricate case that interested him. It is the same with me. I cannot waste my brain-power on trivial matters. I have left my book on evolution and my article on Socialism to take up this case, and I intend to run it to a successful conclusion. Now, Blake is about the last chap one would suspect of stealing anything."

"Right-ho!" said Figgins & Co. together, very heartily.

"Therefore," said Skimpole, "he is guilty."

"What!"

"You see, on the Sherlock Holmes system, I decline the obvious explanation of the case. I suspect Blake because he is the last person one would naturally suspect."

"You ass!"

"Really, Figgins——"

"You frabjous idiot!"

"Besides, there is the further point that Blake, on being questioned as to whether he was guilty or innocent, showed violence."

"Go hon!"

"I, who went to Study No. 6 with the best intentions in the world, was ejected from the apartment with considerable violence."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is nothing, so far as I can see, to excite merriment in this matter, Figgins. I can only take this violence as a sign that a guilty conscience was at work."

"Ass!"

"And as the other fellows all backed up Blake in this violence, I can only conclude that they are all confederates."

"Lunatic!"

"Abuse is not argument, Figgins. It is perfectly



"Can I have some of the ginger-pop?" asked Melish. "Here you are!" Jack Blake opened a bottle, and the cork caught Melish in the face. Melish gave a yell and started back. "Ow!"

me that all these fellows were in the plot, and that is the theory I am now working upon."

"You'd better tell them so."

"Oh, of course, a detective cannot afford to be a respecter of persons," said Skimpole, in a tone of patient explanation. "Was D'Arcy there?" asked Kerr suddenly.

"Yes, certainly. He treated me in a particularly brutal manner with a cricket stump."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see the cause of this explosion of merriment, Kerr."

"Ha, ha, ha! You frabjous ass; it was D'Arcy's banknote that was taken! Is D'Arcy in a plot with the other fellows to steal his own banknote?"

Skimpole started, and rubbed his bumpy forehead thoughtfully.

"Dear me! That never occurred to me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I shall certainly have to modify my theory a little."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Upon the whole, perhaps I have been a little off the track. Things, however, still look extremely black."

"Your blessed eyes will look extremely black if you talk any more of this piffle!" said Figgins warningly.

Skimpole blinked at him patiently.

"It is not piffle, Figgins. It is only your limited understanding that makes you regard the remarks of cleverer fellows as piffle."

"My hat!"

"You see, in different beings the process of evolution has reached different stages. In your case, I should say that the intellect still approximates to a very early period of development. I— Ow!"

Three pairs of hands dragged Skimpole off the balustrade. "Ow! Leggo! It is utterly absurd, Figgins, to be offended by the plain statement of scientific facts."

Skimpole was bumped down in a sitting posture with a shock that took all his breath away, and left him gasping like a fish.

"There!" said Figgins. "That's for talking piffle about Blake."

"Ow!"

Bump!

"That's for talking piffle about the other chaps."

"Ow!"

Bump!

"That's for talking at all. Come on, you fellows!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Figgins & Co. entered the School House, leaving Skimpole sitting on the steps in a very dazed state of mind.

CHAPTER 12.

Mellish Calls a Meeting.

"LISTEN to me!"
 "Rats!"
 "Look here——"

"Bosh!"
 "What I say is——"
 "Piffle!"
 "I—I——"

"Yah! Shut up!"

Mellish was almost green with rage.

It had seemed to the cad of the Fourth that he had an excellent opportunity of paying off his old scores against Study No. 6 now, and he was not the kind of fellow to let it pass unimproved.

But somehow things would not go right.

In the first place, Goro had not only refused to lend a hand in the scheme, but he had received the suggestion in a way that Mellish still squirmed to think of.

And then the other fellows did not take it up in the spirit that Mellish would have wished to see.

Everybody agreed that it was very curious and mysterious about the disappearance of the banknote.

But very few entertained the suspicion that Jack Blake of the Fourth could have taken it.

That some duffer had taken it for a joke—that the rats had gnawed it up—that D'Arcy had lost it, and fancied he had left it in the desk—all these things were possible.

But that Jack Blake was a thief few believed, and few feared to believe.

There were at the most half a dozen fellows in the School House who agreed with Mellish, and they did not belong to Blake's own Form.

There were perhaps a score or so of others who had open minds on the subject, and none of them were among Blake's intimate acquaintances.

In a large school like St. Jim's there were, of course, dozens of fellows who knew each other only by sight, but everybody who knew Blake knew that he had nothing to do with the disappearance of the banknote.

Mellish was trying hard to work up a general feeling against the hero of the Fourth, but he tried in vain.

The mere idea of sending Jack to Coventry was scouted with scorn and contempt; and, as a matter of fact, Mellish was much nearer being sent to Coventry himself.

As a last resource, Mellish had determined to call a Form meeting, and to demand that Blake should be tried by the Form—a course sometimes taken in the Lower School to settle matters which the juniors wished to settle without the interference of the masters.

But even in that Mellish did not seem destined to be successful.

He chose a moment when the junior common-room was pretty full, and started his idea; but the reception it met with was decidedly discouraging.

Mellish mounted on a chair, and persisted.

"I say there ought to be a Form meeting to clear up the matter!" he exclaimed.

To which a score of voices replied, with singular unanimity:

"Rats!"
 "We all know the banknote was taken——"
 "Rats!"

"It looks as if Blake took it——"

"Bosh!" said Clifton Dane.

"In justice to Blake there ought to be an inquiry——"

"Shut up!" roared Glyn.

"He ought to be tried by the Form——"

"Piffle!"

"Look here, you chaps——"

"You look here instead!" exclaimed Hancock, of the Fourth. "We've had enough of your rot! Chuck it!"

"But, I say——"

"Faith, and I say we've had more than enough of it entirely!" exclaimed Reilly, the boy from Belfast. "Ring off, you silly gossoon!"

"There ought to be a Form meeting——"

"Shut up!" yelled Kangaroo.

"I'm not going——"

"Yes, you are, begorra! Have him down off that chair!"
 "Collar him!"

Mellish changed colour. He had never imagined that feeling would run against him like this. But his idea of hitting a fellow when he was down was not likely to recommend itself to British lads.

There was a rush of the juniors, and they surrounded the cad of the Fourth, and he was hauled off the chair in the twinkling of an eye.

"Ow!" he roared. "Leggo! Chuck it! Ow!"

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"We'll chuck it!" grinned Kerruish. "We'll chuck it out! Yank him along, you chaps!"

"Outside with him!"

"Now, then—out he goes!"

"Ow!"

"Chuck him out!"

"Help!"

"All together!"

"Yow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump!

Mellish bumped down in the passage, and rolled over, and then sat up on the linoleum, looking very dusty and dishevelled and enraged.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You beasts!" yelled Mellish. "I—I——"

"Oh, go and get washed!"

"Go and dust yourself!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mellish staggered to his feet. His face was almost green with rage and spite. The loud laughter of the juniors stung him to fury.

"You—you set of beasts!" he roared. "I suppose you like having a thief in the Fourth Form——"

A heavy hand fell upon Mellish's shoulder.

He was swung round, and found himself looking at Darrel, the prefect.

He seemed to shrink into a smaller size as he found the clear eyes of the big Sixth-Former fixed upon his face.

"What is that, Mellish?" asked Darrel ominously.

"N-n-nothing!"

"You were warned to be careful of what you said."

"I—I——"

"You will come to my study," said the prefect

"I—but I——"

"Follow me!"

Darrel strode away, and Mellish unwillingly followed.

He came out of the prefect's study five minutes later with his hands tucked away under his arms, and squirming like a snake as he walked.

His face was almost white. Mellish never could bear pain. He went groaning to his own study.

The cad of the Fourth was making the most of his chance to score against Jack Blake, of Study No. 6.—But it could not be said that he was getting much success.

CHAPTER 13.

Figgins Makes a Suggestion.

FIGGINS kicked cheerfully at the door of Jack Blake's study, and it flew open. There was a sudden exclamation from within.

D'Arcy was standing just inside the door, and as it opened it caught him behind, and he staggered forward into the arms of Tom Merry.

Tom Merry caught him, fortunately, and "passed" him to Monty Lowther, who gave him a gentle shove that sat him down in the armchair.

Arthur Augustus sat there, gasping like a fish, not quite knowing what had happened, but considerably disturbed by it.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated.

Figgins & Co. looked in.

"Hallo!" said Blake glumly.

"Hallo!" said Figgins. "Can we come in?"

"Oh, certainly!"

Figgins & Co. came in.

"Thought we'd give you a look up," said Figgins. "We've been punching noses over in the New House. To judge by appearances, there has been some punching going on on this side."

"Yaas, wathah!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Yes; a few asses had to have their noses thumped," he remarked—"only a few."

"Same on our side. It had to be done, and we did it. A painful duty—painful to the chaps who owned the noses, I mean."

"Bai Jove, you pushed that door open against me Figgins."

"Did I?"

"Yaas, wathah! You are a clumsy ass!"

"Is that the way you always talk to visitors, Gussy?" asked Figgins, in his blandest tone.

"I do not wegard you as a visitah. I wegard you as a New House boundah."

"Peace!" said Tom Merry. "What have you come over

for, Figgy? I can see Fatty Wynn looking at the cupboard; but there isn't a feed on."

The fat Fourth-Former coloured.

"I—I—" he began.

"Shut up, Fatty!" said Figgins, with a severe glance. "We didn't come here for a feed; but, you know, Fatty is always after the grub."

"Oh, I say, Figgy—"

"He's only eaten enough for a regiment of Dragoons to-day, so, naturally, he feels a little peckish."

"Look here—"

"But we didn't come over here to talk about Fatty's appetite. It's too big a subject to be tackled offhand. It's about that banknote."

Blake's eyes began to gleam.

He did not quite know what to expect from his old rivals of the New House. He was in a worried and anxious state of mind, though, or he would have known what to expect of Figgins & Co.

"It seems there's a banknote missing," said Figgins.

"Yes."

"Gussy seems to have lost it."

"It was taken from my desk, deah boy."

"Yes; we've heard all the details," said Figgins. "Some duffers think Blake took it. Some cads pretend to think so. Hence these bruises."

"You are a wathah decent chap, Figgy."

"Go hon!"

"I weally mean it. I quite approve of your punchin' the stupid heads of the wottahs who venture to allude dis-wespectfully to our friend Blake."

"Good! Now that I know you approve, I shall sleep more soundly," said Figgins. "But to come to biznay. I don't think there's a thief in the School House."

"I hope not," said Tom Merry. "But then—"

"There's a mistake of some sort."

"I should be vewy glad to think so," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "But in that case, what became of the banknote?"

"That's what I'm coming to," said Figgins.

"Exactly!" said Kerr.

"You don't mean to say that you know anything about it?" exclaimed Gore, with a stare.

"I've got an idea."

"Get it off your chest, then," said Monty Lowther. "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings—"

"Oh, cheese it! Now, my view is this. We all know what a duffer Gussy is—"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"We're all agreed upon that, I think?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Have you come here to point out self-evident facts, Figgy?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"No, I haven't—"

"You are intewwuppin' me, Figgins!"

"Exactly. Now, as we are all agreed that Gussy is an extra-special, double-action, all-wool, non-skidding idiot, we—"

"Weally—"

"We must consider the possibility that he is making a big mistake. Suppose he never had a banknote at all, but only fancied he had one?"

"Weally, you ass—"

"We all saw it," said Blake.

"Oh," said Figgins, changing his ground, "that settles point number one, then. Next point. Suppose he absently used the banknote as a pipelight, and never put it into his desk at all. How's that?"

"Out!" said Digby. "I saw him put it in his desk."

"Ahem! But as we are all agreed that he's a howling duffer—"

"All!"

"Weally, deah boys—"

"Suppose he took it out of his desk afterwards, and spent it at the tuckshop without noticing what he was doing?"

"You uttah ass!"

Tom Merry nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes; there's something in that. Gussy may have taken it out of the desk and forgotten all about it, and it may be in one of his pockets at this very moment."

"Nothin' of the sort, Tom Mewwy."

"You know what an absent-minded beggar you are, Gussy!"

"I did not wemove the banknote from the desk."

"Well, that's my suggestion," said Figgins. "My idea is that Gussy has lost the banknote, and ought to be made to remember what he did with it. For that purpose I suggest ragging him."

"I uttably wefuse to be wagged!"

"We're quite willing to lend a hand," said Kerr. "If you fellows like to stand round in a circle, we'll take Cussy and bump him till he recollects what he did with the banknote."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I should uttably decline to be bumped."

"By that means," explained Figgins, "we should bump the truth out of him. You know his brain doesn't work very actively. That would shake him up. I really think it's a good idea, and we're willing to take all the trouble."

D'Arcy jammed his eyeglass into his eye; but it was useless, the bruise there prevented it from sticking in its place, and it dropped on its cord again.

"Figgins, I wegard you—"

"Well, what do you chaps say?" asked Figgins, looking round.

Tom Merry laughed.

"No, I don't think we'll take advantage of your generous offer, Figgy. I really think Gussy is right this time, and that he didn't remove the banknote from the desk."

"Oh, all right!" said Figgins. "The idea occurred to us, and we thought we'd come over and make the offer."

"Many thanks!"

"Weally, you know—"

"I hope this will be cleared up all right soon, Blake," said Figgins seriously. "Of course, you know that we know that it's all right."

"Rather!" said Kerr.

"Thanks!" said Blake. "It's very decent of you to say so."

"I think most of the fellows say the same. Mind you let us know if you decide to bump the facts out of Gussy, and want us to lend a hand."

And Figgins & Co. quitted the study.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy glanced round at his grinning chums.

"I fail to see any cause for mewwiment," he remarked.

"I wegard you as a set of wude beasts."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I wegard you as a set of wude beasts."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, pway stop cacklin'!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus quitted the study, and closed the door with unnecessary violence.

CHAPTER 14.

Skimpole Sees It All.

"D'ARCY! D'Arcy!"

"Skimmay!"

"Stop! I want to speak to you!"

Arthur Augustus stopped.

His temper never lasted long, and the brief exasperation had vanished by the time he reached the end of the passage. There he encountered Skimpole, coming along blinking over his notebook, and evidently making a deep study of the notes scrawled therein in an almost undecipherable hand.

Skimpole caught hold of one of D'Arcy's jacket buttons in two bony fingers, in the objectionable way he had, and stopped him.

"What do you want, Skimmay?" asked D'Arcy patiently.

"I have discovered a clue."

"Wats!"

"Upon the whole, I have decided that Blake is not guilty."

"You ass!"

"And I no longer suspect Tom Merry of being his confederate."

"You feahful idiot!"

"I have a new theory. Figgins & Co., on discovering that I had taken up the case, and was on the track, treated me with rude violence."

"Serve you right!"

"It is pretty clear that Figgins & Co. are the guilty parties."

"What?"

"Now, I want your assistance, D'Arcy. I know perfectly well that Figgins and Kerr and Wynn made that ferocious attack upon me because they knew I was on the track."

"You fwabjous idiot!"

"The facts will show. I am not yet in possession of sufficient evidence to lay the facts before the Head—"

"I should wathah think not."

"But I hope to be soon. Will you help me?"

"How can I help you, you duffah?"

"I am going to search Figgins's study in the New House."

"Bai Jove!"

"I expect to find the banknote concealed there."

"Gweat Scott!"

"I require aid. As you know, Sherlock Holmes always had the assistance of Dr. Watson. Will you come and help me?"

"You uttah ass!"

"My dear Watson—I mean D'Arcy——"

"I regard you as a silly ass, Skimmay. If you go ovan to the New House, I hope Figgins will give you a feaful thwashin'."

And D'Arcy jerked himself loose from Skimmay's bony fingers and walked away. Skimpole blinked after him in amazement.

"Now, what can that possibly mean?" he soliloquised. "What would Sherlock Holmes make of that? Has D'Arcy a guilty secret? Is it possible that he is in league with Figgins & Co.? Surely he would not plot with Figgins to steal his own banknote? That would be very extraordinary. Yet, as Sherlock Holmes pointed out to Dr. Watson, it is the extraordinary that happens, and the obvious facts are never correct. It is a very remarkable theory. I think I had better visit Figgins's study, and if that fails me, I will shadow D'Arcy. It is painful to have to interrupt in this way my important work in connection with the origin of species, and to leave my article for the 'Weekly' unwritten. But, after all, I must place my extraordinary intellect at the service of my school-fellows."

And Skimpole trotted over to the New House.

Whether Skimpole had an extraordinary intellect or not, he certainly had extraordinarily short sight, and he was, as Blake had put it, guaranteed never to see anything that was directly under his nose.

He entered the New House, and went up the stairs, quite unconscious of the fact that Figgins & Co. were chatting within six paces of him, and were looking at him with considerable curiosity.

Skimpole went into the Fourth Form passage, and stopped at the door of Figgins's study, and entered it.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn exchanged glances.

"What on earth does the ass want there?" said Kerr.

"Thinking of raiding our grub, perhaps," said Fatty Wynn, naturally thinking at once of the subject that was nearest his heart.

Figgins shook his head.

"Might be coming to visit us, then."

"He didn't tap at the door."

Kerr burst into a chuckle.

"I've got it. He's on the track."

"The—the track!"

"Yes; you know he's playing detective. He's got a clue, and it's led him to our study."

Figgins's brow darkened.

"The frabjous ass can't think that the missing banknote is anywhere in the New House, I suppose!" he exclaimed.

Kerr shrugged his shoulders.

"There's no accounting for what Skimpole thinks," he remarked. "You know what a jolly scientific brain he's got."

"Let's go and see what he's up to, anyway."

Figgins & Co. went along to their study. The door was ajar, and Figgins pushed it a little wider open, and they looked in.

Skimpole was in the study. He did not observe the door opening, and did not see the three wrathful faces looking in.

He had taken out the drawer of the table, and was going over the contents, scattering the various articles on all sides in his search.

Figgins simply gasped.

"Well, of all the cheek!"

"The nerve!"

"The cheeky beast!"

Figgins threw the door wide open and strode in.

The amateur detective looked up with a start, and blinked a little uneasily at the New House chums.

"Well?" said Figgins grimly.

"W-w-w-well!" said Skimpole.

"What are you doing?"

"I—I—I—"

"Burgling?" suggested Kerr.

"Really, Kerr——"

"Is that what you call playing the game, to go through a chap's belongings when he is not in his room?" asked Figgins.

"You mistake me, Figgins. I am not here from motives of vulgar curiosity, but in a professional capacity. I have taken up the case of the missing banknote as a detective."

Figgins's eyes gleamed danger.

"And do you expect to find the missing banknote here?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What!"

Skimpole shook a bony and accusing forefinger at Figgins & Co.

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"Things look very black against you," he said. "I am collecting evidence to show that you three were confederates in removing the banknote from D'Arcy's desk."

Figgins & Co. gasped for breath for a moment. Figgins was the first to find his voice.

"My only hat!"

"Yes. It is pretty clear——"

"Well, I think we may as well be confederates in removing Skimpole from this study, as well," suggested Kerr.

"What-ho!" said Fatty Wynn.

Figgins nodded, and the three juniors laid hold of Skimpole. He struggled, but his struggling did not make much difference. He was hurled into the passage, and then Figgins & Co. dribbled him along the passage as if he had been a football, till at the stairs he picked himself up and fled.

He rushed blindly down the stairs, leaving Figgins & Co. yelling with laughter.

In the lower hall he ran blindly into a big Sixth-Former, and stopped, reeling back with a gasp. The senior's grip closed tightly upon him. It was Monteith, the head prefect of the New House, not the best-tempered fellow in the world. His eyes glinted as he grasped the amateur detective.

"You confounded ass!"

"I—I'm sorry, Monteith."

"What are you racing about for, you idiot, and what are you doing in this house at all?" exclaimed Monteith angrily.

"I am looking for D'Arcy's banknote."

"Eh?"

"D'Arcy has had a banknote stolen, and I have taken up the case as a detective," said Skimpole, recovering himself a little. "Pray release my collar. You incommode me very considerably."

"You came here to look for it?"

"Yes."

"In this house?"

"Yes, in Figgins's study. You see—— Ow! Hold on! Leggo! Yow!"

Monteith, without a word, dragged Skimpole to the doorway, planted a powerful kick behind him, and sent him flying into the quadrangle.

The amateur detective sprawled on his hands and knees.

"Ow!" he gasped. "Yaroo!"

He picked himself up, and without stopping to look back ran across to the School House. D'Arcy was lounging in the doorway, and he grinned at the sight of the hasty and dishevelled Shell fellow.

"Bai Jove! Have you been investigatin'?" he inquired.

"Ow! Yes."

"Things look vewy black against Figgins, I suppose, you fwabjous ass!" suggested D'Arcy sarcastically.

"Yes—or, rather, no. I think Figgins may be considered as cleared, and that I am on the track of the right person at last," said Skimpole, rubbing his aching bones.

"And who is that?"

"Monteith."

"Bai Jove! Monteith of the Sixth!" ejaculated D'Arcy.

"Certainly. He showed such excitement on learning that I had come to the New House to look for the stolen banknote that he gave himself away at once."

"You uttah ass!"

"Monteith is undoubtedly the guilty party. I remember now to have heard some stories of his gambling, or something of the sort. No doubt he was in debt, and took the banknote from your desk to settle with."

"How could he know it was there, ass?"

Skimpole rubbed his bony, bumpy forehead thoughtfully.

"I have not worked out all the details yet."

"You'd bettah not begin, you ass. It's a wathah sewious mattah to accuse a pwefect of bonin' things."

"A detective cannot afford to be a respecter of persons. Sherlock Holmes always——"

"Wats! You'd better stick to evolution, and the owigin of species; they're bettah suited to your intellect," said D'Arcy; and he walked away before the amateur detective of St. Jim's could reply.

Skimpole blinked after him in a puzzled way.

"This is very remarkable," he murmured. "D'Arcy seems to wish me to give up the case; he desires to discourage me in every way. Is it possible, after all, that he had a hand in the disappearance of the banknote—his own banknote? Perhaps, after all, Monteith is innocent, and D'Arcy himself is the guilty party. Yes, that is certainly the case. Yet why should he steal his own banknote? Ah, this is a mystery that would have delighted Sherlock Holmes. This is a problem worthy of a truly scientific brain. But I will solve it."

And Skimpole rubbed his bony hands, and his eyes gleamed behind his big spectacles, at the prospect of tackling that amazing mystery and elucidating the truth.

CHAPTER 15

A Scene in Class.

KILDARE of the Sixth tapped Jack Blake on the shoulder, the next morning before lessons. Blake looked at him with a worried face.

"Any news of the banknote yet?" asked the captain of St. Jim's.

Blake shook his head.

"No, not so far."

"It's very curious."

"Yes, I can't understand it. We've hunted everywhere. We've made Gussy go through all his pockets and things, though he swore he hadn't removed the note from the desk."

"And there hasn't been a trace of it?"

"Not a trace."

"And you have no idea what has become of it?" asked Kildare thoughtfully.

"Not the slightest, unless the rats did gnaw it up. I didn't think so at first, but now it seems the only possible explanation."

Kildare knitted his brows.

"Something will have to be done about it," he remarked. "The story is over the whole school now, and some of the fellows are saying unpleasant things."

Blake flushed red.

"You don't believe them, Kildare."

"No, I don't. I know you are not a thief, Blake, if that is what you mean."

"Thank you, Kildare."

"But something must be done. It seems that somebody must have taken the banknote. Does D'Arcy know the number?"

"No, he never takes the number of his notes; he's a careless ass—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Oh, ring off, Gussy. You're the cause of all the trouble. What the dickens do you mean by having fivers, when other chaps never have more than half-crowns," said Blake crossly.

"Weally—"

"You can get the number, I suppose, D'Arcy?" asked Kildare.

"Waas, wathah. I could ask my governah."

"I think you had better do so," said the captain of St. Jim's. "If the banknote does not turn up to-day, the Head will have to know about the matter."

Blake's look was almost haggard.

"The Head?"

"Yes, certainly!"

"But—"

"Don't be alarmed, Blake; he is not likely to believe that you took it. Anybody might have gone to D'Arcy's desk."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"I hope it will turn out that there is a mistake, and that the note was not stolen at all," said Kildare. "You had better wire to your father for the number, D'Arcy."

"Yaas, certainly!"

"Binks will take the telegram. You ought to have written at once."

"Yaas, pewwaps so; but I nevah can think of these things, you know."

Kildare nodded to the juniors, and walked away. Blake and D'Arcy followed the rest of the Fourth into the classroom, Blake with a very gloomy face.

The matter would have to come to the Head's knowledge, unless it was cleared up; he knew that; in fact, he wondered that Dr. Holmes was not already acquainted with it.

What would happen then?

There was no real evidence against Blake—only the facts that he had gone to D'Arcy's desk, and that he had been flush of money afterwards, and could give only a very lame account of the way he came by that unfortunate sovereign.

That was not enough to find him guilty upon.

Against all that was to be set his well-known character, his record at St. Jim's, the Head's knowledge of his honesty and truth.

Blake had no fear that Dr. Holmes would find him guilty.

But, on the other hand, his innocence could not be made clear. It would be like that curious Scottish verdict—not proven.

The shadow of suspicion would rest upon him.

Would it ever be cleared away?

For where was the banknote? If it had not turned up in two days, what reason was there to suppose that it would ever turn up at all?

Blake's heart was heavy as he thought of it.

His own friends would never doubt him; he knew that. The greater part of the fellows who knew him scouted the idea of his being guilty.

But there were some who believed him so, and there were

others who cared little either way, but thought that the person against whom there was most evidence was most likely to be the guilty party, and that person, of course, was Blake.

The story would probably never die out, if the truth were not discovered now.

And how was it to be discovered?

Blake could see no way.

His face was very glum as he took his place in the Form. Mr. Lathom glanced at him.

The master of the Fourth had already heard of the story from the prefects, and he understood Blake's position, and felt for the lad.

He was careful to pass Blake's absent-minded answers over very lightly, and to take no notice of the continual slips he made.

Blake was in no fit state for work.

With that one black worry on his mind, he could not bring his attention down to his daily tasks.

But suddenly he started.

He had opened his Virgil, in case Mr. Lathom should call upon him to construe, and as he did so, a word in thick black letters stared at him from a paper inserted in the book: Thief!

Blake turned white.

The word was written in Roman letters, to disguise the identity of the hand that had written it; but Blake had little doubt as to that identity.

It was the same hand that had pushed the cowardly note under the door of Study No. 6. Only Mellish was mean enough for that.

Jack Blake glanced round at the cad of the Fourth.

Mellish was looking towards him, and their eyes met.

Mellish changed colour.

Blake's eyes blazed. Unless Mellish knew what he had just found in his book, there was no reason for that change of colour, and the guilty start he gave.

Blake needed no further proof.

His blood boiled up, and he started to his feet. For the moment he forgot that he was in the Form-room, forgot that he was in the presence of a master.

He reached over towards Mellish, and seized him by the shoulders, and dragged him from his seat.

Mellish gave a startled howl.

"Leggo! Oh!"

Mr. Lathom looked on, petrified with astonishment.

"Blake—Blake, what are you doing?"

Blake did not even hear him.

He was pommelling Mellish as if he were a punching-bag, and the cad of the Fourth had no choice but to defend himself.

Blake's blows were fast and hard and heavy, and Mellish was knocked right and left. In a few seconds Blake had his head in chancery, and they struggled among the forms and the startled boys, who were all on their feet now.

"Ow!" yelled Mellish. "Help!"

Thump, thump, thump!

"Take that, you cad—and that—and that!"

"Help!"

Thump, thump!

"Blake, are you mad? Blake!"

"Ow! Help!"

The Form-room was a scene of the wildest excitement.

The fellows were all standing up, staring at the unheard-of scene in amazement and excitement.

Blake and Mellish struggled and reeled among the forms, and Mellish was getting about the worst punishment he had ever received in his life.

Mr. Lathom reached the excited juniors at last, and grasped Jack Blake by the shoulder.

"Blake, desist at once. Stop, I tell you!"

"Help!"

"Blake!"

Blake let Mellish go at last, and the cad of the Fourth rolled on the floor among the legs of the desks and the boots of the Fourth-Formers, gasping, groaning, and almost weeping with pain and rage.

Blake stood flushed and dishevelled, breathing hard.

Mr. Lathom fixed a stern glance upon him.

"Blake," he exclaimed, "what does this mean? Do you want to be expelled from the school? Are you mad? Why have you attacked Mellish in that savage manner?"

"He knows, sir."

"I—I don't!" moaned Mellish. "I never did anything. I didn't say a word!"

"Explain yourself, Blake."

Blake held up his Virgil with the paper in it.

"Look at that!"

Mr. Lathom looked, and his brow contracted.

"Who wrote that?"

"Ask that squirming cad!"

"I—I didn't!" gasped Mellish. "I never wrote it. Blake is a thief, and he jolly well knows it, but I never—"

"How do you know that word is written here, if you did not write it?" asked Mr. Lathom sternly.

Mellish gasped.

In his hurry to exculpate himself he had given himself away completely—for, indeed, how could he know what was written upon the paper if he had not written it himself?

His face went crimson.

"Well, sir, you see, sir—" he began haltingly.

"I see that you are a cowardly and untruthful boy!" said Mr. Lathom sternly. "Blake is undoubtedly right in his conclusion that you wrote this in his book."

"I—I—"

"Under the circumstances, I shall excuse Blake," said Mr. Lathom. "You understand, of course, Blake, that you must be more careful, and that anything like this must not occur again."

"I am sorry, sir. I—I was excited," faltered Blake.

"Yaas, wathah, and no wondah. If I had seen that papah, I should certainly have given Mellish a feahful thwashin' myself," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Silence, D'Arcy!"

"Yaas, sir; but as I was sayin'—"

"Enough!"

"But weally—"

"Silence! Mellish, you have acted in a cowardly and disgraceful manner. I think you have been well punished, but I should certainly cane you."

Mellish scowled.

He could not understand how it was, but he never seemed to be able to get into favour. And here was Mr. Lathom taking Blake's side even after that extraordinary outbreak, and interruption of the morning's lessons.

"You will stay in for the next three half-holidays, Mellish, to think over the meanness of your conduct," said Mr. Lathom.

"Oh, sir!"

"That is enough!"

"But, sir—"

"Not a word more, or I shall cane you! Take your seat!"

And Mellish sat down sulkily.

He did not get any more sympathy from the boys than from the master. Every glance that was turned towards him was condemnatory.

Blake sat breathing hard, his face very pale now that the excitement had passed. He had punished the cad who had taunted him, and that was some satisfaction; but, after all, very little.

The taunt would be renewed. Would it ever die?

Mellish, if he had only known it, and if he had only understood the feelings of a higher nature than his own, had his revenge! Jack Blake was the most miserable junior in St. Jim's.

CHAPTER 16.

Skimpole Gives it Up.

JACK BLAKE wore a gloomy look as he came out of the Form-room after morning lessons. His chums looked at him, but did not speak to him, and did not accompany him. They could see by his manner that he was downhearted, and that nothing they could say or do would cheer him up, and at that moment it was better for him to be left alone.

At that moment it was exactly Skimpole's tactful way to come and bother him. The scientific youth had no time for considering minor matters like delicacy and tact. He was too deeply interested in the origin of species fifteen million years ago to have much regard for the finer feelings of human beings who happened by chance to be living at the present day. He came out of the Shell Form-room, and blinked round in search of Blake, and, discovering him alone, came over and captured him by a jacket-button.

"I say, Blake—"

Jack Blake grunted: "Get away!"

"I want to speak to you—"

"Shut up!"

"Really, Blake, I cannot but regard that as almost rude. I—"

Jack Blake seized the genius of the Shell by the shoulders, and jammed him violently against the wall of the passage. Skimpole's spectacles slid down his nose with the shock, and he blinked helplessly at Jack Blake over them.

"Ow! Really, Blake—"

"Look here," said Blake grimly, "I've had enough of your piffle for the present! I don't want any Determinism, or evolution, or origin of the species, or any other silly piffle. Do you understand?"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 104.

NEXT THURSDAY: "THE TERRIBLE THREE'S TOUR." By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"No, I don't! Pray release me, Blake. You are causing me considerable discomfort. The subjects you have mentioned have occupied the greatest brains—"

"The emptiest numskulls, you mean," said Blake. "Anyway, don't bother me with them. I'm bothered enough at the present moment. Savvy?"

"But I wasn't going to speak about them, Blake. I was about to observe that, in connection with the missing banknote, I—"

"I've had enough of the missing banknote, too."

"Do you mean to say you really took it?" exclaimed Skimpole.

"Idiot! No! I mean to say I don't want to hear anything more about it!" said Blake, shaking him.

"Ow! I understand! Ow! Please don't shake me, Blake; it disturbs my train of thought considerably. I am glad you have not confessed to being guilty, as it would upset my latest and best theory. I have decided that you are innocent."

"Thank you for nothing."

"And that Tom Merry and Lowther and Manners are innocent."

"Ass!"

"Figgins & Co. are also cleared."

"Idiot!"

"Really, Blake, that is almost rude. I have decided, too, that things do not, after all, look black against Monteith, of the Sixth."

"Oh, you frabjous ass!"

"I have worked everything out clearly now. It was D'Arcy himself who abstracted the banknote from the desk."

Blake jumped.

"D'Arcy!"

"Yes."

"But it belonged to D'Arcy!" howled Blake.

"Exactly," said Skimpole, blinking at him—"exactly. And that is what makes this case most remarkable and interesting, and one that would have interested Sherlock Holmes immensely. Why did D'Arcy purloin his own banknote? It is a most interesting mystery. Ow! What are you doing?"

"Knocking your silly head against the wall, you ass!"

Bump! Bump! Bump!

"Ow! Ow! Ow!"

"There!" said Blake. "Now let the banknote alone, and go back to evolution, and the origin of species, and Determinism, and the other rot!"

"Ow!"

Blake walked away, leaving Skimpole ruefully blinking, and rubbing the back of his head. He blinked at the Terrible Three as they came by arm-in-arm.

"Anything wrong?" asked Tom Merry sympathetically.

"Yes," groaned Skimpole. "My head—"

"Ha, ha! You needn't have told us that—we know it!"

"Eh?"

"We know your head's wrong, Skimmy. It's only necessary to hear you on the subject of Determinism to know that. Anything else wrong?"

"Really, Merry—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blake has bumped my head against the wall in the most savage way. I do not know whether there is any damage done—"

Monty Lowther examined the wall.

"No; the wall's all right," he said. "The wainscot is jolly strong oak, you know, and it couldn't be damaged by a softer sort of wood."

"I was not alluding to the wall, Lowther, but to my head. Fortunately, it does not ache. When it aches, I have to leave my brain-work, such as my book on Determinism, and my great volume on the subject of the origin of the human species in the mud of the primeval ocean. If I had not already discovered the purloiner of the banknote, I should certainly think that Blake was guilty, from his conduct."

The Terrible Three gave a simultaneous jump.

"Discovered him!"

"Oh, yea!"

"How?"

"By my ability as a detective, and clever deductions on the same principle as that of Sherlock Holmes."

"And who is it?"

"D'Arcy!"

"D'Arcy!"

"Yes," said Skimpole, smiling loftily at the impression his words seemed to make. "I may say I suspected you three fellows at one time."

"Us?" said the Terrible Three faintly.

"Certainly! But the case is now clear. It was D'Arcy!"

"D'Arcy!" said Tom Merry feebly. "But the banknote belonged to D'Arcy!"

"Yes," said Skimpole, rubbing his hands. "That would

be a floorer to a common intellect; but to a really scientific mind, an apparent contradiction is a greater certainty than the most obvious commonplace. You understand me?"

"Blessed if I do!"

"Ah, your defective brain development is the cause! I will explain. D'Arcy was the last person in the world one would suspect of stealing his own banknote, therefore he did steal it. You follow me?"

"My only hat!"

"D'Arcy is the guilty party. He——"

"Skimpy," said Tom Merry kindly, "you ought to give up detective work. Your brain is more suited to writing books on scientific matters, or repeating the multiplication table, or something of that sort. Give it up."

"Really, Merry——"

"And, as a hint that you have mistaken your vocation, I think we ought to bump you—not because we want to, but from a sense of duty."

"I—I—— Oh, leggo! Ow!"

But the Terrible Three seized the amateur detective and bumped him, and they walked on and left Skimpole in a dazed state.

Kangaroo came along with Clifton Dane and Bernard Glyn, and they looked down at the genius of the Shell in great astonishment.

"Can't you find a chair?" demanded the Australian.

"What on earth are you sitting on the floor for?"

"Really, Noble——"

"Matter of taste, I suppose? I should prefer a chair myself."

"Pray help me up. I have been bumped with considerable violence, and feel very shaken. I must observe that there is a surprising amount of hooliganism developing in this school. I was merely explaining to Tom Merry that D'Arcy was the person who had purloined the banknote, when he—— Yow!"

Kangaroo planted his foot on Skimpole's chest, and sent him rolling over, and then Cornstalk & Co. walked on.

Skimpole picked himself up.

"I—I feel very shaken and confused!" he murmured. "I must say that I am being treated with rudeness and ingratitude. I will give the matter up—they can solve the mystery for themselves. I am not of a spiteful or revengeful nature, but I certainly cannot undertake to clear up mysteries for people who treat me in this manner."

And Skimpole limped away to his study.

CHAPTER 17.

Gore Clears Up the Mystery.

GORE, of the Shell, came up to his study.

There was a thoughtful frown upon Gore's face.

It was curious that the Shell fellow should care much what happened to his old enemy, Jack Blake, of the Fourth; but there was no denying the fact that Blake's trouble did weigh on Gore's mind considerably.

He came into the study, and gave a grunt as he saw Skimpole. Skimpole had the honour of sharing that study with Gore. Skimpole had always found Gore an uncomfortable study mate, owing to the bullying of the Shell fellow; but of late that had been altered. Gore had been quieter and kinder; but Skimpole, on his part, was as troublesome as ever. He still left papers and books lying about the study, and talked Determinism till Gore was bored to death with it.

Skimpole was busily writing at the table as Gore came in. "Hallo, Gore!" he said. "Would you mind looking out a book for me?"

"Br-r-r!"

"I am very busy with my article on Determinism for 'Tom Merry's Weekly.' I require Professor Loosetop's volume for reference, and I do not quite remember where I have left it."

Gore grinned.

"Have you given up the amateur detective business?" he asked.

The genius of the Shell nodded.

"Certainly, Gore! I have found my well-intentioned labours meet with so rude and ungrateful a reception, that I have decided to give up the whole matter."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There is no cause for merriment. I have been treated very roughly. Every fellow I suspected of being a thief seemed to cut up rough about it."

"How surprising!"

"Yes, it shows a want of scientific balance," said Skimpole, with a shake of the head. "I have now resumed my article for the 'Weekly,' for which I borrowed a quantity of foolscap from D'Arcy the other day, but have never yet used. If you are going to stay in the study, I hope you will be quiet."

"Rats!"

"I cannot think when a noise is going on. By the way, have you ever reflected which exerts the greater force in the formation of character, heredity or environment?"

Gore yawned.

"Blessed if I know, or care."

"It is a most interesting subject. Now—— Dear me!"

Gore stamped his foot with a force that made the table jump, and the ink spurted from Skimpole's pen over the manuscript he had just covered with scrawling handwriting.

"Oh, dear! You have spoiled my contribution now."

"All the better," growled Gore. "I'll spoil your features if you talk piffle to me. I've got something else to think about."

Skimpole blinked at him, and pushed the blotted paper aside, and drew a little heap of foolscap from a drawer of the table. As he selected a block of it for writing, Gore started forward with a sudden excitement in his face.

"What's that?"

"Eh? What?"

A crisp, rustling slip of paper was half projecting from among the foolscap. Gore caught hold of it and pulled it out.

"Look!"

"What is it?"

"A banknote."

"Dear me!"

Gore's eyes blazed with excitement.

"It's a five-pound note!" he shouted.

"Is it really? Does it belong to you, Gore?"

"To me? No."

"Then how did it come here?"

"Isn't it yours?"

"Mine?" Skimpole shook his head. "My people cannot afford to send me banknotes. Of course, in a sense it is mine, as under Socialism all banknotes will be nationalised, and I should have my share."

"Is this note yours, idiot?"

"Really, Gore——"

"Answer me, you ass!"

"No, it is not mine."

"Nor mine," said Gore. "How did it come here?"

"I really do not know. Doubtless it came here in some way or other. I am too occupied to trouble my head about such trivial matters. I wish I could finally decide whether heredity or environment exercises the greater influence on the formation of character, as I desire to make that the subject of my article for the 'Weekly.'"

"This must be Gussy's banknote."

"Eh?"

"Somebody's shoved it in here," said Gore. "Stay! You said something about borrowing that foolscap of D'Arcy."

"Yes, that was some days ago."

"Where does he keep it?"

"In his desk."

"He gave it to you from his desk?"

"I took it."

"Took it?"

"Yes. I regarded it as being really as much mine as his, you know, but as a matter of form I mentioned the matter to him. Under Socialism, of course, all foolscap will be nationalised."

"When did it happen?" asked Gore, trembling now with excitement. "Was it the day that D'Arcy missed the banknote?"

"Yes, I think it was."

"Aren't you sure?"

"I am really thinking about other matters. Is heredity or environment the greater force in——"

Gore seized the youthful Determinist by the throat, and pinned him wriggling against the door of the study.

"Now, then, you idiot——"

"Ow!"

"Did you take that foolscap from D'Arcy's desk on the day the banknote was missed, or did you not?"

"I—I—— Yes, I did."

"Was it before the banknote was missed?"

"I—ow!—yes."

"Then you took the banknote among it without noticing it?"

"I really—yes, I dare say I did—I did not notice it. It is really not a matter of any consequence, compared with the influence of heredity and environment."

"You ass!" said Gore. "The banknote's been in this drawer among the foolscap all the time. You utter ass!"

"Really, Gore——"

Gore grasped the banknote and ran out of the study. In the passage he almost ran into Mellish, who stared at the banknote and Gore's excited face in amazement.

"What on earth's the matter, Gore?"

"I've found it."

"Found what?"

"The missing banknote."

"Phew!"

"It was mixed up in some foolscap Skimpole took from D'Arcy's desk, and it's only just turned up," explained Gore exultantly. "I—"

He was pushing past as he spoke, but Mellish grasped him by the arm and stopped him.

"Hold on, Gore!" he whispered.

"Eh? Why? I'm going into Tom Merry's study."

"Wait a minute."

"What for?" demanded Gore impatiently.

"Look here," said Mellish eagerly, "you'll muck the whole thing up. I don't know what your game is in currying favour with that crew in this way, but there's no sense in it. If you show up that banknote, Blake will be cleared."

"That's what I want."

"You ass! You can't take me in with that rot. Why don't you own up to the truth; and I tell you that between us we can ruin Blake, make all the others of that crew as miserable a set of rotters as we like, and have a good time on the fiver. See?"

Gore gave Mellish one look, and then his left fist shot out, and the cad of the Fourth reeled along the passage and crashed upon the floor.

"Oh!"

"I hope that's a plain enough answer for you, you cad!" said Gore.

"Oh!"

"I think it is," said Tom Merry's voice quietly.

Gore started and looked round.

Tom Merry was standing in the doorway of his study. He had evidently seen and heard all that had passed.

Gore's face went crimson.

"You—you know I never thought of doing what that cad suggested," he exclaimed quickly.

Tom Merry nodded.

"I know it, Gore. You have found the banknote, it seems?"

"Yes. Come with me and find Blake."

"Right-ho!" Tom Merry shouted into his study: "Manners! Lowther! Come on! Gore's found the banknote, and it wasn't stolen at all."

"Hurrah!"

And the chums of the Shell and Gore rushed off together to Study No. 6.

They burst into the study like a whirlwind, and the chums of the Fourth, who were doing their prep., jumped up in alarm. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy spilt a shower of blots on one of his immaculate shirtuffs, and gave a howl of wrath. "You uttah asses!"

"Hurrah!"

"Are you off your silly wockahs?"

"Hurrah!"

"What on earth's the matter?" exclaimed Blake.

"Look at that!"

"Eh? It's a fiver, isn't it?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, people have had fivers before without going off their rockers," exclaimed Digby. "What's the row about?"

"It's Gussy's fiver."

"What!"

"What was the number of your fiver, Gussy? Have you got it?"

"Yaas. It's in this wiah fwom my governah."

"Look at that. Is that the number?"

D'Arcy, catching the excitement, forgot all about the damage to his shirtuff. He took the banknote, and compared the number with that in the telegram from his father.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"That's the note?"

"Yaas."

"Good!"

"Where on earth did you find it?" exclaimed Blake, trembling a little now.

"Gore found it."

"Gore?"

"Yes. Skimpole carried it off in some foolscap he borrowed from D'Arcy's desk."

"My hat!"

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "What a set of asses you fellows were not to think of it. I wemembah tellin' you I put the banknote undah the foolscap."

"Why didn't you think of it?" demanded Herries.

"Weally—"

"You ass!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Well, never mind whose fault it was," said Tom Merry. "It's found now, and it never was stolen, that's the great thing. I'll go and tell Kildare. My hat, I'm jolly glad it's turned up. Fancy Skimmy having it all the time, and hunting for it while it was in his own study! Just like Skimpole!"

"He might never have found it, too, if he hadn't given up detective work, and gone back to writing his rotten articles," grinned Gore.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake was quite pale with relief.

"Thank goodness it's found!" he said. "It's been a rotten time for me the last few days. I'm much obliged to you, Gore."

"Yaas, wathah! I wegard Goah as a jolly good fellow."

"He is a jolly good fellow," said Blake. "And as it was all Gussy's fault—"

"Weally, Blake—"

"As it was all Gussy's fault, I vote that Gussy is condemned to blow the whole fiver at a big feed. We'll have these Shell bounders, and Figgins & Co., and Kangaroo and the rest, and Gore shall be the guest of the evening."

"Bravo!"

"Oh, rot!" said Gore, turning red. "I—I—"

"I wegard it as a good suggestion, and unusually sensible of Blake," said D'Arcy. "I second Blake's motion, and pass it unanimously."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the feed duly came off, and the fiver was royally spent, and Gore was the guest of the evening—a novel position for Gore among the chums of St. Jim's—and Tom Merry & Co. vied with one another in doing honour to the fellow who had been their enemy, but who had proved to be their best friend in solving the mystery of St. Jim's.

THE END.

Next Week:

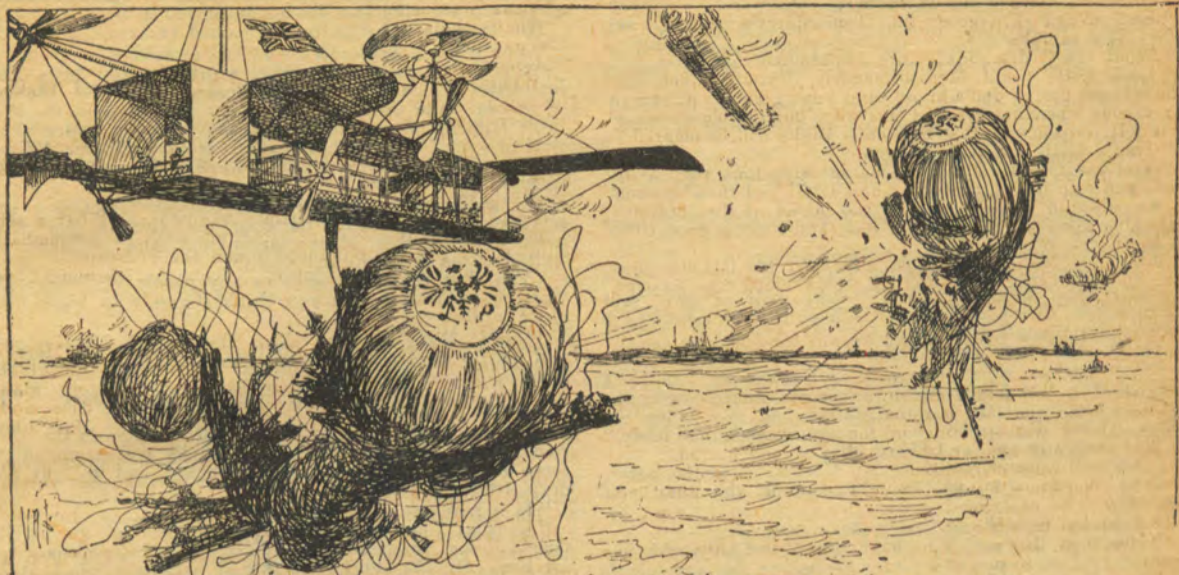
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BRITAIN'S REVENGE

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS ARE:

AUBREY VILLIERS, nicknamed Sam Slick. A lad who has performed wondrous service for his country in her time of need, during the terrible invasion by the Germans.

STEPHEN VILLIERS, his brother. He is Sam's companion in all his exploits.

The two boys form part of the crew of the Condor, a wonderful airship invented by John Carfax. The airship has been brought quickly to Russia at the instigation of Harrington Carfax, the inventor's brother, who has a scheme for getting possession of the Tsar's person, in order to prevent Russia from joining Germany against England.

Carfax succeeds, and the Tsar is taken to Windsor on the Condor, where Lord Rolles is apprised of the capture.

(Now go on with the story.)

The Plans of the Diplomats.

"It is possible I may leave by another road," said Harrington, "so don't wait for me, in case I do not come back here."

Lord Rolles raised his eyebrows slightly; but whatever curiosity he felt he did not show it, nor that Harrington's words puzzled him. He had been told only enough to secure the interview, and no more. Just then a muffled whir on an electric bell sounded for an instant, and Lord Rolles opened the door and motioned to Harrington to follow him.

He was taken up a flight of stairs, and shown into a not very large, but richly-furnished room, in perfect taste, with a small inlaid writing-desk at one end. Harrington was left there alone; but hardly had Lord Rolles's footsteps died away than a door opened at the farther end of the room, and a gentleman entered, before whom Harrington bowed with deep respect.

The new-comer, however, advanced and held out his hand to Harrington with the greatest courtesy and frankness.

"Good-evening, Mr. Harrington Carfax!" he said, with a pleasant smile. "You are welcome, as before. But you bring serious news?"

"I do, sir. Else I should not have dared to ask for an audience in such an irregular way, and at such a time."

"The welfare of the State is the first consideration," said the gentleman.

the new-comer; "the hint contained in your message was enough. But have you consulted the Foreign Office?"

"No, sir. There is no time for talk," said Harrington simply.

His companion smiled.

"Your news is?"

"That Russia is on the point of joining Germany in the struggle against us, sir."

"I know it," said Harrington's host, his brow clouding; "and much evil may come of it. You do not come from the Foreign Office with this news, however?"

"No, sir. I come from Russia."

"From Russia! By the night-boat from Calais. Ah, I augur good from this!" said Harrington's host, with interest, seating himself in the chair at the desk.

"I might have known you came by no ordinary route," he added, with a peculiar smile. "What fresh information have you for me?"

"The exact terms Berlin is offering to the Russian Government, sir."

"Mr. Carfax, you are a wizard, indeed, as many of our people firmly believe. What are the terms?"

"An alliance against Japan, the reconquering of Manchuria, the cession of India to Russia on the breaking up of the British Empire. Russia is to take all European possessions in Asia. Germany's share is to be the British Colonies in Africa, and the French territories there."

"When?"

"When Russia's army has turned the scale against us, and enabled Germany to crush France and ourselves."

Harrington's host put his hand to his forehead, and thought deeply for some minutes. Only the ticking of the clock broke the silence. Then he rose, and began slowly to pace the room, his commanding form as erect as ever, but his face dark and grave.

"When were these terms to have reached the Russian Government?" he asked. "Can you tell me that?"

"This afternoon, sir, about four."

"Then they are now being considered."

"No, sir. The message has not been delivered."

Harrington's host stopped short.

"Have you reason to believe this offer will be accepted?"

"I am certain that it will be, sir."

His companion nodded.

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"Yes," he replied quietly. "Russia will accept, without any doubt. And the decision lies with—"

"With his Majesty the Tsar, sir," said Harrington, as his host looked at him.

The latter nodded again.

Monarch to Monarch.

"Thank you for this information," he said gravely; "it is of the greatest value. But the Tsar is surrounded by advisers who make the result certain. He is now at Elsass."

"Your pardon, sir, but the Tsar is no longer at Elsass, though the whole of his people still believe him to be there."

"Where, then?"

"He is here, sir—at Windsor."

Harrington's host stared at him as if he doubted his sanity.

"What do you mean?"

"The Emperor Nicholas is now in the Condor, within easy reach of us, sir."

The gentleman paused in quiet amazement.

"You have dared to make the Tsar captive?"

"We have induced him to come with us, sir," said Harrington, with a smile, "in the hope that he might have the honour of conferring with you."

Harrington's host said nothing.

"There is one great personage in Europe, sir," said the gold-master, "and only one who can avert the catastrophe of this new war. He has the ability, and so I bring the Tsar to him. I mean be whom I have the honour to serve."

Harrington bowed low to his host.

"You are a wonderful man, Mr. Carfax," said the latter. "Does no one know of this visit, and of the guest you have?"

"None but myself and the Condor's crew, sir."

"How can this meeting be arranged? Can you bring your aeroplane to one of my upper windows, for example?"

"It is just what I had hoped you would allow me to do, sir."

"Very well. Go up the main staircase to the next landing. Open the door on your left front when you get there, enter, and wait for me."

Harrington bowed again, and withdrew. He went to the room indicated, and shut the door. It was a handsome, panelled apartment in the older part of the Castle, and the window, which once had been small and obscure, was now a large, double one.

"The very room and the very window," said Harrington to himself. "My host makes no mistakes. There won't be any need to alter the plans."

The gentleman he had just left came in, and shut and locked the door. He made a sign to Harrington, who opened the window casements quietly, and gave the signal.

Silently as a great barn-owl, the Condor flitted down out of the darkness, her platform coming level with the window-sill, which was nearly even with the floor of the room. John Carfax was at the helm, and Stephen stood beside him.

Standing ready on the deck was Sam, with the Imperial guest beside him. The next moment he had escorted his Royal charge into the room, the Condor vanished again, and Sam, standing by the Emperor, made the military salute to Harrington's host.

As Sam's eyes fell upon him, the boy knew in whose presence he was. The erect, commanding figure, the dignified face and kindly eyes, were those of the first gentleman in Europe. And though he was in plain evening-dress, and the Tsar was richly uniformed, no man would have hesitated as to which looked the more kindly of the two. Sam flushed, and a thrill ran through him as he realised all that that meeting meant. But he stood to attention, and did not open his lips.

There was dead silence for some moments. The Tsar looked strangely pale and ill at ease. The gentleman in evening-dress, looking him quietly in the eyes, spoke first.

"Well, cousin," he said, "I hear you are about to league yourself with my enemies."

The Tsar's pale cheeks turned red, and he found his tongue.

"Is it to you I have to look, sir," he said excitedly, in English, "for the explanation of this outrage?"

"I know of no outrage," was the quiet reply. "You have up to the present been Mr. Carfax's guest. You are now mine."

"Why not give things their plain names?" said the Tsar bitterly. "I am helpless, and so it is useless to complain. Is it your intention to keep me a prisoner? And, if so, why?"

"That seems a question for Mr. Carfax. A sovereign commands as far as his power reaches," said the gentleman in evening-dress, with a slight smile. "Mr. Carfax at

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present I consider to be the emperor of the realms of the air—a region till now unconquered, cousin. Is it not so, Mr. Carfax? His Imperial Majesty appears to be in your charge."

"I am at your commands entirely, sir," replied Carfax slowly. "If peace can be preserved, we shall all rejoice. By to-night his Majesty the Tsar shall be back in Elsass, none even knowing that he left it, if you give the order."

The Tsar started slightly and looked amazed.

"You will not keep me, then?" he exclaimed.

"Cousin," replied the other, smiling, "you have had intentions, which you now doubtless regret. The highest of us can make mistakes. Is it not so? Let us see if a little friendly conversation will not serve us better than steel or guns." He turned to Harrington and Sam. "Gentlemen, will you leave us for a while? There is an ante-room in front of you."

The gold-master and the scout obeyed. Entering the small room, and shutting the door, they left the two great personages together. Harrington and Sam sat down to wait, but the latter looked uneasy.

"The Tsar refused to give us any parole, sir," he said, "and he is armed. Do you think it's safe to leave him alone with—"

"Quite. Have no fear about that," said Harrington; and his lip gave a contemptuous curl. "Our great master is in no danger from him."

"This is a wonderful business," muttered Sam. "It seems like a dream."

They could hear the sound of the conversation in the next room, though not the words. The kindly but commanding tones of the British gentleman were heard, and in reply the deep, troubled mutter of the other.

"Is it going to succeed?" whispered Sam.

"It is as good as settled. Have no fear of the result. Our—our commander will show Nicholas what is good for him. He has altered the fate of nations before by tact and wisdom, where noisier potentates use bluster or threats, or war. The victory is ours already."

The conversation in the next room lasted but a little while longer. The Tsar's voice was hardly heard at all, save for an occasional word. Then there was silence, and the two aeronauts were summoned back.

The—let us still call him the gentleman in evening-dress—was standing with his hand just raising itself from the Tsar's shoulder, and he smiled genially. Nicholas himself rose out of the chair in which he had been sitting huddled together, and his head drooped. He averted his face.

"Gentlemen," said their host, "it is due to you to know the result of our conference. There will be no war between ourselves and Russia. Germany's terms are refused."

Harrington bowed, and Sam drew a breath of deep relief.

"It is so, is it not, cousin?" added the speaker. "I wish these gentlemen to hear."

"Yes, it is so," said the Tsar, in a low voice. "You have my pledge for it."

"So there will be no upheaval of Europe in a fresh carnival of bloodshed. I look forward already to the day of universal peace," said the first speaker. "This being settled, Mr. Carfax, his Imperial Majesty will be glad to return at once to his own country."

"Your commands shall be obeyed, sir," said Harrington, stepping to the window and giving the signal with the electric flash-lamp. "I answer for it that the Emperor shall reach his home again before the next twenty-four hours are spent."

The Condor came down to the window and hovered alongside it, her fans spinning overhead.

"Then I leave my guest in your charge, Mr. Carfax," said he in the evening-dress, shaking Harrington warmly by the hand with a dignity that became him. "I am served by many loyal men, but I can call to mind none that have ever done me such a service as you have rendered to-night."

He turned to Sam.

"You, too, sir," he added, smiling. "It is the first time we meet, but I recognise you, and know you well for the most famous of all my younger subjects. Give my greeting also to your brother. And you, Mr. Harrington Carfax, to yours. It is no time now to tarry."

Sam, flushing with pleasure, bowed low over the hand that was held out to him, and felt that no service could be great enough for such a master. Then, giving the salute and turning, he marshalled his Imperial captive on board the Condor once more at a sign from Harrington.

"Farewell, gentlemen," said the host; and, with a slight smile, he added: "Good-night to you, cousin!"

The Condor soared up until Windsor was no more than a dark blot upon the sleeping earth, and then, with her head turned towards Russia, she put out her utmost speed.

The Dynamitard.

The Tsar, without a word or a look, went into the deck-house as soon as he was aboard, and shut the door heavily. The others, too, felt it was no time to talk for some moments. The success was such a relief.

"All's well, then!" said John Carfax at last.

"Absolutely. Russia is out of the game. Germany is brought up short," said Harrington. "We owe it to one man alone."

"I saw him," said Stephen impressively; "that was worth something. I never understood the meaning of 'Royal' before. I'd like to have kissed his hand. He's the only person on earth I'd do it to, and like it."

"He sent you his greeting, kid."

"That's something! Where are we bound now?"

"To set the Tsar back in his own place," said Carfax.

"And then?"

"A very different errand. We've got to get into the thick of the fighting, for I've a curious bit of work on hand," replied John. "Things haven't stood still while you boys have been monkeying about in the Vosges."

"Monkeying about! I like that! After our upsetting the Black Hound, and routing him out!" chuckled Sam.

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!" interposed Kenneth.

"Well, I own we had a little help from Montgomery's Horse. But one won't be sorry to smell powder again. It worries me to have this poor Royal person on board, now we've made all the use we can out of him."

"I bet it worries him, too," said Stephen. "We shall be glad to be quit of each other."

Watch by watch, her crew sleeping and resting in turns, the time wore on, the night giving place to day, and the day to darkness again, while the airship kept high above all observation, and covered swiftly the journey to Russia. They saw little or nothing of their captive, or "guest," as Harrington called him, and he was made as comfortable as circumstances would permit, and left to himself. It was close upon ten o'clock next night, and less dark than it had been, when the towers of the Palace of Elsass were made out in the distance, as the Condor lowered rapidly, and the Emperor was requested to make himself ready to alight.

"Are you going to put him right back in his room, sir?" inquired Sam.

"No; too risky. Bad for him and us, too, for it would show everybody what's happened, if we were seen. His Imperial Majesty," said Harrington, "must make his way home on foot, and give whatever explanation he chooses."

"They'll think he's been out all night walking on his own, like Haroun what's his name in the 'Arabian Nights,'" said Stephen.

While they were yet a mile from the palace, the airship came gently to the ground upon a clear, snowy space surrounded by dark belts of pine-trees, and the Tsar was called.

"It is but a short walk hence to the palace," said Harrington, "and you will be home in twenty minutes. It is best that none should see where you come from. We part now, and I am sorry to have been obliged to put your Majesty to so much trouble in these two days."

The Tsar hesitated a moment.

"Perhaps it is all for the best," he said. "I begin to believe so."

Not another word did he say, but stepped off the Condor's platform on to the frozen snow. Carfax saluted briefly, and as the airship rose high and turned to the southward, they could see the Emperor Nicholas, still motionless, gazing silently after the great vessel as she sped away and vanished.

"A piece of work well done," said John Carfax. "He dare not go back on his word now, for he is a man with a pride of his own, and all Europe would ring with this story. I need tell no one here that not a word is to be breathed of it outside the Condor. And now for Tournay."

"That's the place where the Condor was repaired, isn't it, sir?" asked Sam. "Does she need more mending, then?"

"No, she is as sound as a bell; but I have got one or two novelties there, which I am going to take aboard before we hurry on to the front. I had them sent on from England, and you may count on it that the Condor is going to be more formidable than ever."

"What are they—fresh range-finders, sir?"

"You will see presently. It will not take long to arrange. We've every facility at Tournay."

"The French Government were very good about it," said Kenneth.

"They put their greatest workshops and buildings there entirely at our disposal, and their best electrical works. There's a shed that holds the Condor easily, and we've got our own staff over from Hampshire."

"Don't see how they could do less," said Stephen, "considering what you've done for them."

"They've made the workshops over to us entirely, and

given us an armed guard of police to keep it all strictly private," said Carfax. "The French are very well up in that sort of works. It makes a handier headquarters than Salisbury Plain. I've got one or two surprises for you yonder."

The aeroplane was over the Russian frontier again by daybreak, going at a good, steady pace, but not at forced draught, for there was no need to strain her now they had not a stray monarch aboard.

Sam and Stephen turned in till about midday, when Tournay was in sight.

The Condor came on the earth in a great enclosure near some big sheds and electrical workshops. A prefect of police hurried forward, and welcomed Carfax effusively. The aeronaut called the boys to him, and took them to one of the great sheds, which were securely locked, fenced by an enclosure of high railings, and guarded by a picked force of police.

"Do they know what they're guarding?" asked Stephen.

"The curious thing is that they don't," said Carfax, smiling, "and neither do you; but I'm going to show you."

He let the boys in by a small door, and once in the interior of the building they were astonished to find it sheltered another aeroplane, apparently the Condor's double.

"By Jove," said Sam, "you're right, sir; this is a surprise! When did it come?"

"By night, about twenty-four hours before we left for Metz. It was stowed away in here at once."

"Then we're going to have two airships at work now?"

"No; this is the Eaglet, which you saw uncompleted at my home months ago. She is only an experiment."

"Experiment, sir?"

"Yes; and not quite a successful one. She looks very like the Condor, doesn't she? But she's on quite a different principle—a new notion altogether. It will be an even greater success than the Condor when it is perfected, and I have time to build another. But there are faults about this one. She is not up to the Condor's form. It's no great matter, for I don't want two aeroplanes running loose in this war."

"What are you going to do with her, sir?"

"Destroy her."

"Why?"

"It's not well to leave her as she is out of my charge, if she's not to be kept. The Eaglet must perish, and that very shortly. But," added Carfax, with a grim chuckle, "I shall contrive so that she makes it hot for the enemy before her last moments. She shall perish with honour."

The boys were wondering how he expected to bring this about, when two strangers entered the building—one a keen, dark-complexioned youth of about twenty-three, and another with a fair moustache, a year or so older.

"This is my son Harold," said Carfax, introducing the younger of the two, "and his assistant, Bernard Winters. Harold had charge of the Eaglet at home, and he was carrying out my schemes."

The new-comers shook hands warmly with the boys, and all were quickly on good terms.

"Are the new bomb-guns here, Harold?" said Carfax.

"I had them placed in the iron-cased shed outside," was the reply.

"Let's go and see them."

Harold led the way to another building, where the boys were soon inspecting some queer-looking light mortars, or guns. They were of large bore, but very light, hardly more than tubes, with some very clever and simple swivelling gear and lock-actions. Sam examined them with great interest, for he was keen on all guns.

"You don't know what to make of those, do you?" said Carfax. "They're a new thing; they're for firing powerful explosive bombs at close range, and are designed for a special kind of work. I hope very soon to show you what they'll do in action. We're going to mount four of them on the Condor's fore-platform."

"Shall I have a chance of handling them, sir?"

"Be sure of that; I hope you'll soon become our chief expert with them. You're so handy with a Maxim that you'll soon get the hang of these. You'll find them terrors in a fight. Let's get them mounted rightaway, for I want to be on the warpath again by sunset, and at the front by morning. Are you ready to help?"

Sam asked nothing better, and having a very good idea of the mounting of guns, he set to work with Carfax, Hugh, and the crew of the Eaglet, to get the four strange-looking guns mounted in their places on the Condor. The operation was a rather long one, and it was some hours before the third gun was in place.

This sort of work was out of Stephen's line; he was no engineer, and neither had Kenneth much experience in mounting guns. As their services could be spared, the two

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of them presently strolled away together, talking earnestly over the chances of the campaign. They passed beyond the enclosure where the Condor was, and out of sight of her, round by the machine sheds.

"We're going to be pretty busy at the front," said Kenneth. "The chief's going to make things hum now he's got this new gear; and we sha'n't need to waste any time. It's a great score, you see, having these headquarters so handy and so well guarded. I should think—"

He broke off, and was silent so long, watching the uniformed figure of a police-agent a little distance away, that Stephen remarked on it.

"What's up?" asked the young scout.

"I'll bet my ten fingers," said Kenneth slowly, "that that's no Frenchman yonder!"

"What!" said Stephen, following his gaze. "Why, man, it's one of our police guard!"

"Yes, he's uniformed; but I know Frenchmen and Germans as I know cats and dogs, and I've never been deceived in one yet," said the aeronaut. "I can smell 'em out apart, if you put them in two different bundles and mixed 'em up. That chap walks and looks like a German."

"By Jove, you aren't far wrong!" muttered Stephen, watching the man, who was making his way forward in a rather stealthy manner, by the back of the sheds, to the enclosure where the Condor was.

"I know I'm not wrong," said Kenneth; "and, anyway, he's no business so near the enclosure. The innermost police pickets are on the other side of the wire fence. There's only one thing he can be up to, if I'm right, and that's mischief."

"Then let's go and get hold of him and make sure."

"Certainly! Just dodge back quietly, and round the long iron shed yonder. We shall come up behind him then, and can satisfy ourselves. Only handle him very carefully when you get hold of him. Mind you use him extra gently!"

"Gently! Why?" said Stephen, in suspense.

"Because," replied Kenneth drily, "I've got an idea we shall die a very sudden death if we don't; so bear it in mind! Come along; he's getting too near the Condor for my liking!"

Quietly and rapidly the two comrades made a detour round the sheds. The police-agent had had his back to them before, and still had it so when they sighted him again; but now they were in a direct line right behind him.

They might be very well making a mistake, and Stephen in his heart rather thought they were. The actions of the man were not openly suspicious. He was probably only making a tour of the place to see that all was right, and that the Condor and the machine-sheds were well guarded. And his uniform, number, and equipment were all correct.

But Kenneth had made up his mind how to act, and he took no chances. Coming up just at the rear of the man with a step silent as a cat's, he suddenly seized the police-agent's wrists, and with one dexterous twist, crossed the man's arms behind his back. The man gave a violent start, and a cry broke from him.

"Mille diables!" he exclaimed. "Are you mad? What do you want?"

"A little talk with you," said Kenneth coolly, holding his wrists as in a vice. "Stephen, put your hand inside the breast of his jacket, and tell me what you feel there."

Carfax the Judge.

The police-agent made a desperate struggle to free himself, but he was perfectly powerless in Kenneth's powerful grasp. He swore violently, then, looking at the stern faces of his young captors, suddenly changed countenance, and began to look scared.

"On the left side, I think," said Kenneth. "Possibly inside his waistcoat."

Stephen did as Kenneth bade him, and searched with his hand inside the man's coat. He wore a short police cape over his shoulders, and his uniform was baggy.

There was nothing in the coat itself, for it had no pockets. But in the inside of the loose tunic, sure enough, was some good-sized object or other, about the size of a brick, as far as Stephen could judge by the feel of it.

"There's something here," he said, "in an inside pocket. It feels like a sandwich-case, but I don't think it is one."

"It's only food!" cried the police-agent, trying to shrink back from them.

"Shall I take it out?" asked Stephen.

Kenneth thought for a minute.

"Better leave it where it is just now," he answered. "The chief shall judge. But, first of all, go and call up the officer in charge of these police, will you?"

"Right! Can you manage the chap while I am gone?"

"Yes; with one hand tied behind me!" said the powerful young aeronaut contemptuously. "But hurry up, all the same!"

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Stephen departed on his errand, and the captive, who had grown very pale, began to bluster.

"You will get into trouble over this!" he said furiously. "You will soon know what it is to assault a French police-officer! Better far that you call that boy back before it is too late, and let me go!"

"If we've made a mistake, it's soon put right, and I will make reparation and apologise," said Kenneth drily. "But the best way to clear it up is to have the officer of police here at once, don't you see?"

They had spoken in French, but now Kenneth suddenly changed into German, though he did not know that language very well.

"Who sent you here?" he asked.

"I understand no German. Speak in French," said the man.

"Oh, very well!" replied Kenneth, as he saw Stephen returning with the officer of police. "But, before it is too late," he continued, in the same tongue, "tell me what price you put on yourself? Can you get one thousand francs into my hands if I let you go?"

The man hesitated. He was about to make the same reply as before; but the commissaire of police was approaching rapidly, and, as Kenneth said, it would soon be too late.

"I will guarantee you double the sum," he said quickly, in French, "if you will let me go!"

"Ah!" replied Kenneth, more drily still. "So you understand German, my friend, after all?"

"This is infamous! You are trying to trick me!" said the man.

"I am defending a big stake," said Kenneth, "and mean to make sure no harm comes to it. If you are playing the traitor you will have to pay the consequences. Well, Monsieur le Commissaire," he added, as the police-officer came up with Stephen. "I have a little investigation for you here. Who is this man?"

"I am doing my duty watching the compound, sir," cried the prisoner to the officer; "and these persons dared to lay violent hands on me!"

The police of countries always hold together, and the commissaire frowned at Kenneth.

"Will you explain, monsieur," he said sharply, "what you mean by molesting one of my men?"

"If he is one of your men he has no business so far within the compound," replied Kenneth quite civilly. "But is he one of your men? That's what I'm asking you. He speaks excellent French, but so good a Frenchman as you must detect he has some slight trace of a German twang in his words."

Kenneth was as good a French scholar as the Villiers brothers were at German.

"That is true," said the commissaire, twirling his moustache doubtfully; "but it is very slight, and he may be an Alsatian."

"I am an Alsatian—of French Alsace," exclaimed the prisoner. "I beg of you, Monsieur le Commissaire, to order this person to let me go! It is an outrage!"

"You will see," said Kenneth, "that we have an immense responsibility in guarding this airship of ours, the Condor, and I would not let the President of the Republic himself come mouching round these sheds. I have reason to believe this man intends treachery."

"He's got something inside his—" began Stephen, but Kenneth checked him, and made a sign to him to keep silent about that.

"He is undoubtedly an agent of police," said the commissaire.

"One of your own men?"

"Not exactly that. He is under the command of Monsieur Leblanc, on the other side."

"There is a number on his collar—No. 98," said Kenneth. "Will you send to inquire of Monsieur Leblanc about No. 98, and why he should be willing to pay two thousand francs to be released?"

On hearing this the commissaire blew his silver whistle at once, called up a subordinate, and sent to inquire. It was not long before an entirely different man, though dressed in a precisely similar uniform to the prisoner, was brought to the spot, and the number on his collar was 98. The commissaire, looking very grim, put one or two questions to the newcomer, and read a note he brought from his officer.

"You had reason, monsieur," he said to Kenneth, dismissing the man. "That is the right 98. The man you have there—"

"Who denies he understands German, and yet able to answer it," put in Kenneth.

"Is an impostor! He is undoubtedly a German spy," said the commissaire, glaring at the prisoner fiercely; "and

I am desolated to think he eluded my vigilance and got in here. I fear I shall be disgraced, and I deserve it."

"I don't think you need be," said Kenneth. "We will arrange—"

"But I will now relieve you of him, and when it is proved against him he will be handed over to the military authorities and forthwith shot," said the official sternly.

"It is much better—for him and you—that no fuss should be made about the affair," said Kenneth. "Leave him in our hands, and our chief shall judge him. We have the right, I think," Kenneth added, "for we have been given a free hand to order all matters as we think fit within this enclosure of ours."

The commissaire hesitated.

"It seems irregular, monsieur," he said, "and yet I shall be very glad to be quit of this business, and Monsieur Carfax and his crew are privileged persons. Take the prisoner, then. I hope all will be well."

"Have no fear," said Kenneth. "If he is no spy he will be released. If he is a spy, why, he will find himself in a very unfortunate position, that's all. Good-day, sir!"

The commissaire departed, evidently uneasy, and very glad to take himself off, hoping matters would be smoothed over, for he was responsible that no dangerous characters should enter the place. Kenneth, who all this time had kept the man as fast a prisoner as ever, nodded to Stephen.

"Come on!" he said. "The Chief will very soon settle this affair."

He marched the prisoner in front of him to the far side of the sheds, and thence to where the Condor's crew were putting the finishing touches to her new guns. John Carfax looked up, and he scanned the sham police-agent's face keenly.

"Well, Kenneth," he said, "what have you got there?"

"A German spy, I believe, sir. I told the commissaire you would deal with him."

The prisoner broke forth into a torrent of words, but Kenneth silenced him, and told Carfax what had happened. The crew stopped their work and looked on curiously.

"You didn't take out the thing he's carrying?" asked Carfax.

"No, sir, I thought that was best left to you."

"Quite right."

The aeronaut stepped forward, and, searching the man, drew forth the object Stephen had found. It was a good-sized square, flat, iron case, rather heavy, and was perfectly plain and bare.

"What is this?" said Carfax to the man, who was very pale.

"It is nothing but a case of emergency rations," said the captive rather hoarsely.

"Why did you bring it here?"

"I always carry it with me in case I need it," was the reply.

"That is strange," said Carfax coldly, "for I see no way of opening it. It has been soldered up."

"I can open it, monsieur, if you will give it to me."

"Why not drop French now and speak German? You will be more at home in it."

"I don't know any German," answered the man sullenly.

"You will stick to that?" said Carfax, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Very well. You say the tin contains food. I think not."

"Give it to me and loose my arms and I will prove it to you."

"No doubt that would suit you very well," said Carfax drily, "but it would be rather risky. I believe the tin contains something rather different than food. Now, I have not much time to waste with you, so I will put you on your trial very promptly. You are suspected of treachery. Guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty!" said the captive sullenly. "But you have no right to judge me."

"I shall not. I shall let circumstances judge you instead, and if you are guilty your own sin will probably kill you. You don't understand that, eh? You will very shortly. Kenneth, make his wrists fast behind his back."

The assistant fastened them quickly with a strap. Carfax then replaced the curious-looking tin back in the man's breast-pocket.

"Get up on the deck of the aeroplane," he said.

"What for?" asked the prisoner, turning very pale.

"I am going to let you see something of her. Keep close to him, Kenneth, and keep him upright. Take your places—the crew."

There was no help for it, and the man did as he was bid. The Condor's crew were quickly at their stations, and Carfax mounted the bridge.

"I am going for a short trial spin to see how she carries those guns," he said. The Condor rose in the air, and the captive gave a gasp. She sailed away at an even pace out

of the compound and away to a stretch of bare, stony heath-land a mile away.

"She goes excellently. A little adjustment of balance is needed, that's all," said Carfax. "But we have first to deal with this gentleman."

He brought the Condor down till she was forging along over the level ground at about the speed of a four-wheeled cab, and not more than ten feet up. Carfax turned to the prisoner, and his eyes were stern.

"We will now see if you spoke the truth," he said. "You will jump to the ground when I give the word, and once there you may go your own way."

The man blanched with sudden terror, and he shrank back.

"Jump?" he exclaimed.

"Certainly. It is quite a small leap—not more than ten feet, and we are going slowly. You will land on your feet, of course. The slight momentum will make you fall forward on your face after you land, but that will be nothing. You can get up and go on your way—probably not even shaken."

"I believe you are the fiend himself!" cried the man wildly. "I will not jump! For heaven's sake do not make me do this! I will make a full confession!"

"You cannot confess anything I don't know already," said Carfax. "See how mercifully I am treating you. Most men would be overjoyed at having the choice of a mere ten-foot jump instead of being executed as a spy. If you have spoken the truth no harm can come to you."

"At least, then, take this iron case of rations from me," said the spy hoarsely; "for if I fall forward on it it may hurt me severely."

"You must take it with you," said the aeronaut inexorably. "A mere iron case can do no hurt. A slight bruise, at the worst."

"I won't go!"

"What I am offering you," said Carfax coldly, "is plain, bare justice. Will you jump or be thrown off?"

The spy hesitated. Then, with a wild cry, he sprang through the open rail, throwing himself back as a man does who jumps from a moving train. The instant his feet quitted her the Condor sped forward at a tremendous pace.

Down went the spy, but in that brief second the aeroplane was fifty yards ahead. The man's feet touched the ground, and he made a desperate effort to steady himself, but the momentum was too great, and with some force he fell forward.

The Fight at Oldesloe.

The Condor shivered from end to end at the shock of the explosion, but she was out of reach of danger. Kenneth and the boys were dumbstruck at the man's awful end, and they stared silently at the spot. Carfax was the first to speak.

"He has met the fate he intended for us and for the Condor."

"You knew it was a bomb he carried, sir?" said Stephen.

"What else could it be? A powerful petard, with a detonator inside it, to explode it as soon as it was thrown."

"Then he meant—"

"To get within reach of the Condor in the compound. Then one sharp throw, and Germany would have need to reckon with us no longer. We could not have rebuilt her for many weeks—even if we survived, which was not likely."

"It might have been the turning-point in the war," said Sam.

"Exactly. Well, we need not trouble the commissaire now, and I hope there will be greater vigilance in future, else I shall change my headquarters back to Hampshire."

"It was a dastardly trick enough, but clever."

"Another of their Secret Service jobs. Well, I gave the man his chance. Could he have kept his feet he would have gone scot-free."

"He had his deserts," said Sam, with a grave nod, and there was silence.

"And now to work," said Carfax briskly. "Sam, I want you to see if you can handle those new guns. We've a capital ground for it out here on the moor. Try them stationary at first."

The airship darted away a couple of miles to the north, and Sam, choosing the middle gun, soon made himself master of its mechanism. Then a set of charges was put in, and on Carfax's direction he lined the gun on a boulder not more than sixty yards away.

The first shot smacked the solid rock into three pieces, and the second and third, following at two-second intervals from

the same gun, burst the boulder into dust and fragments, amid a cloud of yellow smoke. The concussion and power of the shells were enormous.

"That beats any artillery I've seen!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. "By gosh, it's wonderful! How far will it work, sir?"

"Only at very short range," said Carfax. "The guns would be of use only on the Condor, for they are bomb-throwing mortars rather than artillery. We shall carry our lives in our hands when we use them in action, but I believe the idea's sound. Now, I want you and Hugh to handle them while we go at a good pace."

He pointed out a number of large rocks in different places over the moor, but no great way apart, and chose them as targets. He then bore along towards them at about fifteen miles an hour, and afterwards at double the pace, Sam and Hugh firing as they went.

Expert gunner as he was, Sam believed it would take a long spell of practice to fire accurately at such speeds, but the beautifully simple plan on which the bomb-guns worked, and the arrangements for giving aid in aiming and firing, made it an easy task. As Carfax said, they were as handy as pistols. Sam hit more than half his targets on the second round, and accounted for all but one the fourth time. Hugh's record was not quite so good.

"There'll be no standing against these guns, sir, if the Condor can get to close quarters enough to use them," said Sam, when the practice was over.

"You would be able to handle them well enough in action now, I think," said Carfax.

"There'd be no difficulty about that, sir, if I'd an opportunity."

"You shall have the opportunity very shortly indeed," said the Chief. "I promise you that; but I shall not bring these guns into action in any small affair, for we shall have to risk the Condor considerably to use them. There'll have to be a big stake to win when we play our trump card."

"Yes, sir; I see."

"Round with her, Kenneth. We'll go back to the compound, and I think we ought to get our sailing orders before night."

The aeroplane made her way homewards to the enclosure at a steady pace. Carfax saw the commissaire of police near the outer gates, and, stopping the Condor, called out to him:

"You need give yourself no further concern, monsieur," said Carfax, leaning over the bridge rail. "The gentleman you left in my charge will give no more trouble."

"Sapristi!" said the commissaire. "You have not let him go, surely? Where is he?"

"It is more than I can tell you," returned Carfax drily; "but his account is balanced, and you need no longer fear for your commission. But please see that no more spies effect an entrance here, no matter how disguised."

They left the commissaire twirling his moustache in perplexity, but looking relieved none the less. He evidently

did not quite know what to make of it, but the Condor had no time to waste with him. She settled gently in her old place near the sheds, and she was hardly there before Harrington Carfax was admitted to the gates and came hurrying forward.

"John," he said, drawing his brother aside, "have you seen anything of a police-sergeant, marked No. 98, trying to get into the compound?"

"Yes," said Carfax. "It's all right. We abolished him." He told his brother briefly the fate of the spy.

"Ah, that was very easily done!" said Harrington. "I had just learned that the attempt was to be made. I've been a little out of touch with things, cruising about with you on the Condor; so I came up to warn you, though I don't suppose for a moment that he'd succeeded in getting the better of you."

"Kenneth and Stephen Villiers detected him as soon as he got in, and they spotted something wrong about him. Without counting myself, I'm

pretty safe with such smart youngsters about me, Harrington. Any news?"

"Yes; great news!" said the gold-master. "There's a big battle coming on, and a great deal depends on it. If we win, it will be a long step towards Berlin."

"Ah!" said Carfax. "Has Marechal Sainte Croix cleared the way at Metz, then?"

"No, no; not on the French side at all. They're still in a deadlock at Metz—Sainte Croix and the British battalions against Von Hohenberg. It's the main British Army in the North I'm talking about."

"Yes; they mean to win their way southwards from the North Sea, while Sainte Croix marches north from France," said Carfax. "We left General Blake at Husum, holding out as best he could against the Germans, while he waited for reinforcements by sea."

"Well, he has got his reinforcements, defeated the Germans at Husum, and has pushed right on through Holstein Province, fighting most of the way. It was a splendid march. He's got a long way south, and now he's at a place called Oldesloe, on the River Trave."

Carfax nodded; and Sam, who had drawn near, listened eagerly.

"General Blake is held in check there. The Germans have hurried up a huge force to meet him, and the two armies are face to face. The River Trave lies between them. Blake's on the north side, and the Germans on the south. Blake has to get across and beat them," said Harrington.

"Good! Will he do it?"

"We all hope so; but it will be touch and go," the gold-master replied. "He's got an immense task before him. If he drives back, it will be a great set-back for our side, as you can see. They are in action now, and the fight's likely to decide itself to-morrow one way or the other."

"This is news indeed!" said Carfax keenly. "Now, have you learned what General Blake's chief difficulty is?"

"He's very well placed, but the Germans are very strong in guns, and their batteries are all marked and under the heights. They may make it impossible for Blake to cross the river and get at the Germans. He's not at Husum now, and can get no help from gunboats, as he did there."

"How did you get this news?"

"By my own methods," said Harrington, with a nod. "Never mind about that. Come into the deck-house, and I'll show you on the ordnance map exactly how the guns are likely to be placed."

John Carfax went at once, beckoning to Sam to follow him, and the three consulted the map for several minutes. Then Carfax rose.

"Sam," he said, "we'll take a hand in this. It's just where we can be most useful."

"Those bomb-guns, sir—" began Sam.

"Yes. And the Eaglet shall go, too. I've got a scheme in my head for her."

"A brace of aeroplanes on the job at once!" exclaimed Sam, rubbing his hands delightedly. "But I thought you said the Eaglet was going to be sacrificed, sir?"

"Just so. Where she can do the most good. It will be dark in an hour, and we must start directly the light fails. There is much to be done first. Harrington, what are you going to do?"

"My voyages with you are ended, brother," said the gold-master. "I shall be of no particular use to you at Oldesloe, and I am needed in Hampshire. I shall return by the night boat from Havre."

"You have done an immense service, as it is," returned Carfax. "We shall be sorry to lose you, Harrington, but so it must be. Come, boys!"

There was a brief but warm leave-taking between Harrington and the rest of the crew, and that strange personality—whose power, like his brother's, was above the power of emperors—left the place quietly and departed homewards.

(Another instalment next week.)

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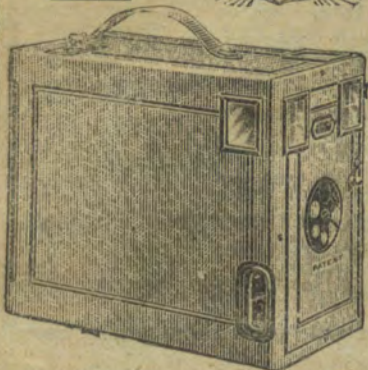
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